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**ICCFA Magazine author spotlight**

► Burn is director of cremation services for the ICCFA. She is an ICCFA University faculty member.

► She previously was cremation services manager at Wilbert Funeral Services Inc., Forest Park, Illinois, having started as manager of funeral service communications in 1991.



► Go to [www.iccfa.com](http://www.iccfa.com) to the Cremation Coaching Center for information about the ICCFA's First Impression Cremation Phone Shopper Program, which allows you to monitor the first impression your company is making on callers. Burn makes the calls, acting as a consumer requesting information on cremation.

► Contact Burn for information about conducting in-house cremation training.

► Go to [www.iccfa.com](http://www.iccfa.com) to the Cremation Coaching Center, where you can post a question for Burn to answer. [www.cremationcoach.com](http://www.cremationcoach.com)

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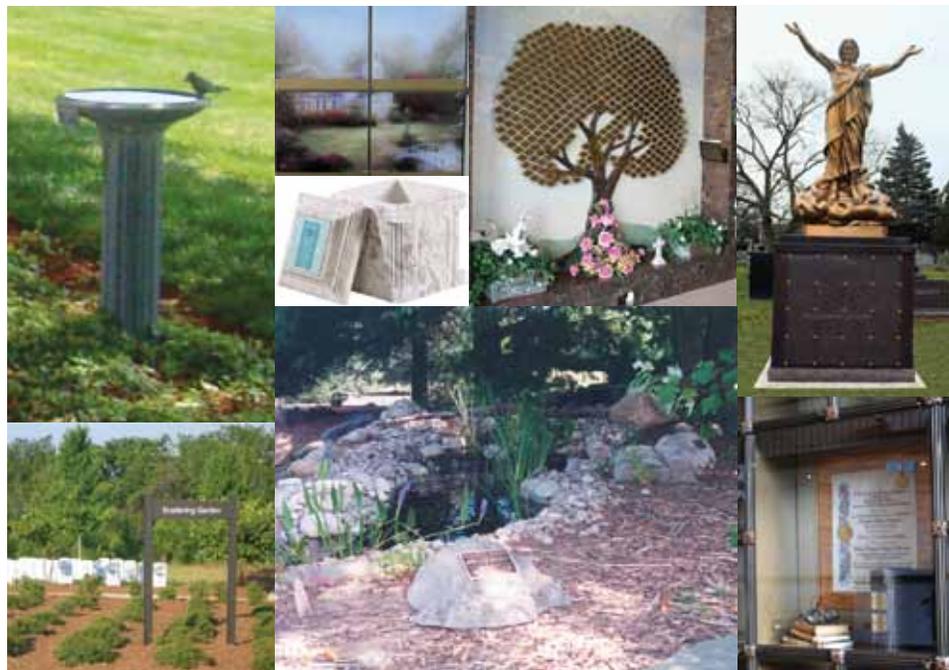
► Burn, Christine Hunsaker and Mary Ziegler will present "Cremation: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," at the **ICCFA 2013**

**Wide World of Sales Conference**, January 16-18, at the Monte Carlo Resort & Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada, go to [www.iccfa.com](http://www.iccfa.com) or call 1.800.645.7700 for more information.

**Photos in the collage, clockwise from upper left: Sundial at Menifee Valley Memorial Park (close-up of cover photo); section of an Aeon mural columbarium; Trigard urn vault; bronze memorial "tree" at Foxwood Mausoleum; columbarium topped with statue by Inspired Artisans; glass-fronted niche at Los Parques, by Matthews Bronze; cremation nature trail at White Haven Memorial Park; scattering garden at a national veterans cemetery.**

**CREMATION**

Whether you are talking to families as a funeral director or a cemeterian, it is part of your job to educate them about how they can permanently honor their loved ones.



# How we should all be talking to families about memorialization

While reviewing websites and making "mystery shopper" calls to funeral homes the past two years, I have found that the profession as a whole needs to improve how we educate families about what they can do with their loved ones' cremated remains.

We say we believe in the importance of everyone having a final resting place where families and friends can visit, pay tribute to and remember our loved ones for generations to come. Yet when talking about final disposition to cremation families, placing the urn in a cemetery niche or cremation garden is often the last thing we mention—if we mention it at all.

**What we're teaching people to do**

Some examples of what I have seen on funeral home websites:

• "Cremation allows families many choices for memorializing a loved one. Some families choose to keep the cremated remains with them at home or to scatter the remains over land or water." Note: No

mention of permanent memorialization.

• "Cremated remains can be scattered, kept at home or buried." Note: Scattering is mentioned first; burial is mentioned last.

• "If the body is cremated: 1.) Cremated remains can be stored by the family, 2.) You can scatter the cremated remains over land or water and 3.) You can place the cremated remains in a cemetery." Note: Cemetery placement is again mentioned last, and in this case, taking the cremated remains home is the first option listed. And we wonder why so many families have an urn sitting on a closet shelf!

Many families are at a loss about what to do with a loved one's cremated remains, so taking them home to be stored and forgotten ends up being the default choice. It's no surprise that we continue to hear stories of adult children or even unrelated homebuyers discovering an urn stored and forgotten in a closet, attic or garage.

I recently asked an acquaintance what her family did with her mother's cremated remains. She told me her mother had not

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indicated what she wanted done with her remains, so they were at her sister's house.

I asked her if the funeral professional they worked with had told them about their final disposition choices, and she said no. The family told the funeral director they planned to take the remains home and that was the end of it.

It troubles me when a funeral professional does not even address the memorialization choices available, and this anecdote is not an isolated case. In all of the mystery shopper phone calls I have conducted, calling funeral homes to ask about making cremation arrangements, fewer than five percent of the people I've talked to have asked me if my family had made plans for what we would do with our loved one's cremated remains.

### Why funeral directors should care

Perhaps funeral directors don't spend a lot of time talking about final disposition because they feel if the cemetery will be getting the revenue, it's up to someone at the cemetery to talk about it.

To those funeral directors, I say:

- When memorialization is given short shrift, often families don't learn about the multitude of options that cremation makes possible because remains can be divided. Cremation jewelry, memento-sized urns and similar options can bring satisfaction to families and revenue to the funeral home without closing out the possibility of cemetery memorialization.

- You are foregoing potential revenue if you don't talk to families about the possibility of inurnment at a cemetery, even if they choose to scatter a portion of the remains at the deceased's favorite beach or mountain range.

Going to the cemetery may mean a committal service at the grave site, columbarium or in a garden, as well as the possibility of an upgraded urn (and, for burial families, a coordinated urn vault), if it's going to be displayed at the service or in a niche instead of shoved into the back of a closet.

- Most important, we must never forget that families think all of us—funeral directors, cemeterians, crematory operators, suppliers—belong to the same

profession. If a family comes back to you and asks why you didn't tell them about all their options for permanent memorialization, do you really want to say, "Because that's the cemetery's job"?

In speaking to sales counselors, I have found that, for the most part, they do mention memorialization choices, even if they work for a funeral home. However, some counselors start by talking about scattering or keeping the urn at home, rather than beginning with permanent memorialization choices.

### How to do it better

Let me suggest some ways to ensure you provide cremations families with the information they need to understand the value of and options for permanent memorialization.

- 1. Don't tell families that cremation is a final disposition/alternative to traditional burial.** It is confusing for consumers and suggests that they do nothing with the cremated remains. Though most state laws describe cremation as final disposition, we all know that cremation is actually the preparation for final placement.

- 2. Make it a practice to let cremation families know all their final disposition choices,** whether during an arrangement conference or while speaking with a phone shopper.

If the people you are talking to say they will be taking the cremated remains to another city or state, or that they don't know yet what will be done with remains, do not assume they don't want permanent memorialization. Inform them of their options.

- 3. When you talk about final disposition options, start with the options for permanent placement, including:**

- burial,
- outdoor columbariums,
- niches inside columbariums and mausoleums,
- cremation gardens with different types of memorials, including nature trails, and
- scattering sections where they can inscribe their loved one's name on a plaque or other memorial.

When you tell families about the option to keep the remains at home, mention that they should take into consideration what this means long-term. Where will they keep the urn? What will happen to the urn after they are gone?

If your funeral home is not affiliated with a cemetery, consider picking up some brochures about the cremation memorialization offered by cemeteries in your area, especially if they have attractive and creative options. A photo of a beautiful glass-front columbarium might even inspire a family to buy one of those lovely urns you have in your display room.

When you talk about scattering, be sure to mention cenotaph memorialization. Perhaps a local cemetery has a tree of remembrance or other cenotaph-type of memorialization you could show families.

- 4. Make sure your website includes adequate information on permanent memorialization.** I strongly advise you to include "cremation" on your main navigation bar, whether you have a funeral home or cemetery.

Along with your service offerings, you can list final disposition options, starting with permanent memorialization, followed by scattering (with the option of a cenotaph) and then keeping the cremated remains at home.

Photos of different types of permanent memorialization will make it easier for consumers to understand their options, and the Internet makes it easy to link to appropriate photos.

For many years, our profession has been trying to help cremation families see value in having a meaningful service for their loved ones. That will no doubt continue to be a challenge for many years to come, but I think it's fair to say that overall, we've made some progress in this area.

Let us now take another great stride by ensuring that cremation families are presented with all their final disposition options so they can make well-informed decisions. It is the responsibility of all of us in funeral and cemetery service to provide families with the opportunity to preserve their loved one's legacy with dignity through permanent memorialization. □