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**ICCFA
Magazine
author
spotlight**

► Daves is market director for Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens, Memphis, Tennessee.

www.memphisfuneralhome.net

► The firm's cremation rate is about 20 percent, for a total of approximately 300 cremations per year.

► Memphis Funeral Home and Memorial Gardens opens up its facility each July for a tour by ICCFA University students.

Related articles

► Jim Starks, CFuE, CCR, describes policies and procedures for the return of cremated remains on page 46.

► Beacham McDougald talks about his funeral home's bedroom setting for identification viewings on page 34.



Memphis Funeral Home creates this kind of peaceful tableau for the return of cremated remains.

Making the handover of cremated remains a meaningful event for family members

One day a couple of years ago, I was walking through the lobby of one of our funeral homes and a fellow came in to pick up his mother's cremated remains. There they were, in a box sitting on the corner of the reception desk. The receptionist said, "Here she is; sign this receipt."

He took the box and walked out the door like he was leaving a grocery store with a six-pack of beer or something, and I thought, "Wow."

We'd been doing it this way for years, but watching it take place, it struck me as a crude way to return the remains to the family. We put our heads together and identified special places where we could set up the urn for the family.

We purchased some fancy table runners and figured out how to fold them just right. We place the urn or box on top of the runner. When the family comes in—and we generally know ahead of time when they're going to come in—we have candles burning on the table.

We escort the family to the room and ask them if they'd like a few minutes, and almost every family says "yes." We get them seated, close the door and say, "We'll be right outside; you take as long as you want." Some families take 10 minutes; we've had families spend as much as 45 minutes in the room.

Afterward, the funeral director helps the family to the car with the urn. SCI now has urn bags, carrying cases we put the urn in when we do this.

Overall, we're trying to make a bigger deal—which it should be—of the family taking possession of their loved one's remains.

Family-friendly identification procedure

Within the past year, we also have changed our procedure for identification viewings by the family. Our prep people put a little makeup on the deceased, fix the hair and put the deceased in a new gown or pajamas. We place the deceased in a ceremonial or rental casket and send them back to the funeral home location where the family made the arrangements.

When the family comes in, we've got soft music playing in the visitation room and candles burning. We don't just ask for the identification; we say, "If y'all want to have a few minutes, I'm going to close the door and be right outside."

We have received a positive response from our families for doing this. We've had people come in and say, "Thank you for this time; we really appreciate it." About six months ago, we actually had a family decide after the identification viewing to have their loved one embalmed and hold a visitation service before the cremation.

Before we started doing this, we had been placing the deceased on a cot, covered by a sheet. It was a sterile sort of atmosphere. Now, with the casket, the soft music and candles, the surroundings are better for the family. It's been a home run for us. □