

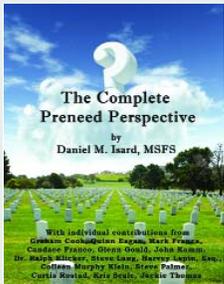
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CREMATION MEMORIALIZATION

Looking for a way to draw cremation families to your cemetery?
Want a type of memorialization that will keep them coming back?

Take a good look at glass-front niches.

They have a lot to offer both families and cemeteries.

Glass-front niches the key to attracting cremation families, bringing them back

Nothing has generated more cremation sales enthusiasm than the creation of glass-front niches. While most of us see them as a relatively "new thing," they have been around for more than 40 years in commercial production. Regardless of how old the concept is, to people seeing it for the first time, it's new.

In my three decades of writing articles about this industry, I have rarely written to endorse a tangible product. I am normally writing about some financial ratio or procedure.

Why am I endorsing a product category now? Because rarely has a tangible product, either cemetery- or funeral-related, demonstrated to me that it has such a high viability and unlimited future.

Benefits to families

Glass-front niches capture the attention of the cremation consumer, who is usually a better-educated person who is looking for personalization. Many understand that the cremated remains of their loved one go from being a point of sacred responsibility to a liability when kept at home. For families who do not immediately scatter the remains of their loved one, the benefits of inurnment in a columbarium are clear.

Glass-front niches also capture the desire for personalization which is so prevalent today. Most graves look alike. Most solid-front niches look alike. Rarely have I seen two glass-front niches that appear the same, due to the fact the family can decorate the niche with photos and other mementos to create a memorial image.

The ability to personalize a glass front-niche allows a family to celebrate and keep their loved one's memory front and center in very tangible ways.

Benefits to the cemetery

Glass-front niches are a wonderful source of revenue. You might start out pricing them at one level, but I recommend keeping prices fluid. For

example, every time 20 percent of the comparable inventory sells out, I like to raise prices on the balance 20 percent.

So if you have a 10-niche-high columbarium and each row has 20 niches, if four spaces on row three sell first, I recommend raising the price on row three by 20 percent.

In order to keep the parity of pricing, regardless of the sales on other rows, change their prices as well. If row four is priced 10 percent higher than row three, I raise the prices on row four at the same time I raise them on row three.

You might give your salespeople the chance to alert families who are considering purchases about two weeks before the prices will be changing. Constant sales activity actually creates a bit of a demand and ongoing market.

I recommend following the same pricing strategy on grave spaces and granite-front niches as well, but glass fronts tend to be a purchase that families come back to visit more frequently.

Options you can offer

Redecorating. One reason they come back more frequently is because you can encourage them to do so. For example, an opening and closing incurs a fee. You could notify all families who have niches that on three weekends during the year you will have a staff person on site to open and close for a nominal fee (for example, if the routine published fee is \$300, for these special weekends it might be \$85).

Families can use this time to change what they have in their niches, something they're more likely to want to do if they have a glass-front niche where they can create a display.

This fee must be paid in advance, so if no one registers, you don't have to do it—very cost-effective. If four families take advantage of this, at \$85 apiece, you generate \$340, which easily covers the cost of providing the service with a profit for the cemetery. Everyone is happy.

Depending on the site and the age of your nich-

es, you should expect anywhere from 5 percent to 10 percent of the families with occupied niches to sign up for this service. This is a very profitable afternoon. It also leads to additional sales, so you should have a member of the sales staff nearby.

Different sizes. When glass fronts were first created, they were all the same size. Over time, the industry learned that families want companion niches so that a couple can share one niche. The size of these units is going to be double the width of a single.

Unlike a companion burial, where the pricing is often 150 percent of the price of a single interment, these companion spots can be at least double the cost of single spaces.

Premium locations. The location of the niche can affect pricing. If you have a bench in the center of a wall of niches, the niches in front of the bench could be priced higher than those away from the bench. This provides more revenue, and should more than pay for the bench.

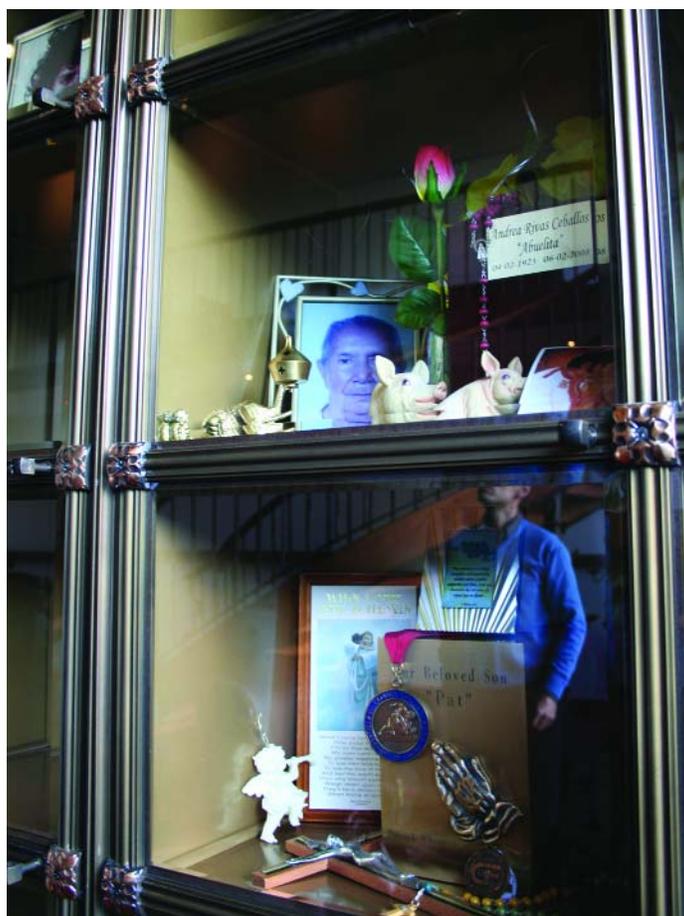
Premium sizes. You will find that some people are looking for a show-place niche. In each niche wall you can have some that are double wide and double high. These are going to generate a premium, just as a private estate or private wing of a mausoleum will command a premium.

Interior lighting. Lighting is a new feature we are seeing. Of course, you want to use low-watt and low-heat bulbs to make sure there is no chance of causing a fire. Look into using solar power to provide illumination.

The use of lighting also helps to personalize the niche. Granite-front niches don't need electricity, but the glass-front ones could, and this "extra" can generate more revenue.

Two-sided views. Often glass fronts are put into an area that is very compact and surrounded. Niches that have more than one side open to view can also be priced at a premium, since that is more attractive to the consumer.

Often in a niche wall there is only one



Two of the niches at *El Portal de Las Bellas Artes*, the museum and cremation center at Los Parques, Guatemala City, Guatemala, show how glass fronts allow for personalization.

end column that has this two-sided view. Just as the end house on the block may have a larger lot (or just seem to) and sell for a premium, so should those end niches.

Outdoor, funeral home options

When considering whether glass-front niches can be part of an outdoor mausoleum design, security issues come up. The oldest glass-front niches I have seen were in a cemetery I managed in Hawaii, and that was in an outdoor mausoleum. There was no overt security on the property. No thefts or vandalism have been recorded in the past two decades.

Only you can assess the risks inherent at your location in terms of where you can place a niche wall, glass or otherwise, but I would think that with reasonable security that risk can be covered.

The concept of a glass-front niche can be part of a funeral home as well as a cemetery. Many funeral homes are seeing part of their property being used for niche interment, and glass fronts work well.

The only difference between a funeral

home and a cemetery is the land and building of a funeral home is not on property consecrated or deeded into perpetuity for that use. So a funeral home has to spell out what happens if it wants to move the niches. This is something your lawyer can help you address.

Challenges to consider

The only negative with glass front niches is sometimes cemeteries have trained their families to come in and place flowers on graves and in holders for mausoleums and niches.

Glass niches get cluttered when there are flowers in front of them, but it is important for families to visit their loved one's niche and to do something to symbolize the fact that they have been there.

If the Smith family niche has flowers and the Thomas family doesn't, the Smiths can assume no one from the Thomas family came by during this holiday time. The problem is that often the flowers block another niche's view. The cemetery caretaker is left to settle these turf wars.

Some cemeterians have not understood that a glass-front niche is attractive to people because of what they can see inside. Someone 20 years ago must have published an article advising cemeteries to allow only identical bronze urns in a glass-front niche so the unit looks uniform.

I have seen three such niche walls, and despite being glass-fronts, they do not sell well, because they are bland. If the interiors of all the niches are going to be the same, you might as well use solid-wall niches.

Glass-front niches are selling at a greater rate than ground spaces or solid-wall inurnment. Use them to help people keep their memories of their loved ones alive.

Invite people to come back to the cemetery to decorate and redecorate their niches. With the right pricing model and sales team, glass-front niches are the key to the cremation kingdom. □