

# Providing More Options to Cremation Families

By Mike Devaney

**We are all aware that cremation has been rapidly growing over the past several years.**

The cremation rate has doubled over the last 15 years, and projections are for that growth to continue. 2016 was officially the year when the U.S. cremation rate topped 50 percent. This was an anticipated milestone we knew was coming, but yet in the minds of many funeral professionals was equally dreaded.

According to a 2015 Funeral and Memorial Information Council study, the percentage of people who reported that they were “definitely” or “somewhat likely” to choose cremation as an option more than doubled since 1990 – from 31 percent to 65 percent. Clearly, cremation is becoming the new tradition, so it behooves us to focus on the best way to help cremation families by providing an array of memorial and service options.

Families still need guidance when they call on us. We need to remind ourselves the majority of families embrace the idea of commemoration for their loved ones. It is our obligation as funeral professionals to offer them the guidance, expertise and respect they deserve. Therefore, the notion of equating cremation with less service must be eliminated from our mindset.

The question becomes, how can we accomplish the task of providing value and meaning to cremation families? Truth be told, most of the time they don’t know what they want until given options. We must be active inquirers, not order takers. We must first listen and then provide choices in



**A memory table filled with life artifacts can make a graveside committal service more personal and is a good place for displaying the urn and vault.**  
(Photo credit: Wilbert Funeral Services Inc.)

service, product and personalization. In other words, we must educate families on cremation options and help them create an experience.

One of the first decisions a family needs to make is the final resting place of the cremated remains. Depending on the choice, the funeral professional can guide the family as to specific service and product options.

## Permanent Placement

If the family chooses a permanent resting place such as a cemetery or columbarium niche, there are several service options available. Many families prefer a meaningful committal ceremony at the graveside or niche to help commemorate their loved one’s life. This can be simple or elaborate,

religious or secular, private or open to the community. Whatever the family chooses, this creates an environment for family and friends to share special connections and memories during the service. What is important is the family feels the experience creates a lasting impression of remembrance.

## Graveside Committal

Graveside committal can be made more personal with a memory table highlighting life artifacts that reflect life hobbies and interests. An urn lovingly selected by the family along with an urn vault displaying a special image or personal photo becomes a focal point of the service. For a final touch, the urn vault can serve as a memory capsule forever holding

mementos alongside the urn placed by family and friends.

### **Columbarium Committal**

A similar memory table display can be used for a committal service at a columbarium niche. As family and friends express their final goodbyes, the committal concludes with the urn placed into the niche. Many times, it is important for the family to directly place the urn in the niche if possible.

### **Balloon Release**

Whether proceeding graveside or to a columbarium committal, families can choose unique final celebrations such as balloon or dove releases that give the participants an opportunity to bid farewell in a symbolic and uplifting way.

### **Home Placement**

Many times, families are not sure where the cremated remains will ultimately be placed. They may choose to take the cremated remains home to display in a prominent part of the house. While this gives comfort to have their loved one close to them, they should understand that this may not necessarily be a permanent solution as custody of the cremated remains may change over time.

Prior to the family taking their loved one's cremated remains home, they should be given various options for holding a meaningful memorial service at a place of their choosing. Whether the service takes place at the funeral home or another public setting, it is important to listen to the family's wishes and help them create a personalized tribute honoring their loved one.

Consider guiding the family to create a focal point for the service. Choosing an urn creates a lasting vessel to hold cremated remains and provides family and friends a point of reference to remember the deceased person. Don't just display urns on a wall, but show the

## **VIEWPOINT**

**Families still need guidance when they call on us. We need to remind ourselves the majority of families embrace the idea of commemoration for their loved ones. It is our obligation as funeral professionals to offer them the guidance, expertise and respect they deserve.**

relationship of how mementos, jewelry, keepsakes, urn vaults and other accessories can add value to the overall purchase decision. Do not assume families know these are available if you don't feature them. Give them an opportunity not only to view urns and keepsake products, but to touch them as well. This can elicit feelings of emotion and memory for individual family members. Give them a variety of visual and tactile references to help guide their choices. Engraving adds another personalized touch with text, special verses or images.

### **Memorial Service with ClearVault**

In addition to selecting an urn, another unique display option for the family to consider is the ClearVault acrylic urn vault. The ClearVault provides a stunning way to showcase an urn while providing complete protection as well when the decision is made for permanent placement in a cemetery. It can be engraved with personal information and an image providing an additional way to honor the loved one. The clear acrylic also makes for a beautiful memory capsule displaying special items surrounding the urn, making an extremely personalized and meaningful centerpiece during services. This option is truly unique as it allows for home display while the family considers the location for permanent placement.

### **Scattering**

While scattering is a popular practice, it comes with the caveat that it is irreversible. Many times, families are not thinking about the long-term consequences, especially considering the use of land and water may change over time. This is not to discourage scattering as a form of memorialization, but it is important for the funeral professional to guide the family as to all the ramifications.

### **Jewelry and Mementos**

The funeral director may suggest that a portion of the cremated remains be scattered and the rest placed in mementos or memorial jewelry as permanent keepsakes. This way there will always be a tangible reminder of the loved one for family members to touch and keep close.

These are just a few examples of options available to present to cremation families. The key for the funeral professional is to first be an active listener as to a family's wishes. After finding out where they prefer the permanent placement of the cremated remains, guide them by providing various service options that create a meaningful and personal experience in remembrance of their loved one.

Always look for ways to do more for your cremation families. You are not promoting cremation per se, but rather promoting service and value. •