

Welcome to a Remembrance Tribute

"...I do not care what happens to this body. It is simply an empty house. And I do not need a grave for my family to visit and pay homage. My mother was buried in 1982. I have not been to her grave five times. She knew I loved her. I tell her I appreciate all she did for me. I will see her again when I get home (heaven)."

This was a consumer's recent comment on a funeral industry blog about his feelings toward funeral planning. How many would agree with these statements and the overall viewpoint? It seems that statistics back this statement up with a very large spike in cremation, nonreligious services and what is a change in sentiment that will last for generations to come. Why is this? Why are more families leaning to alternatives to the traditional funeral service? Could it perhaps be something that the funeral industry has done to move people away from the "norm" or could it be the consumers themselves simply wanting something different?

While visiting Florida a few months back, I found what may be answers to these questions while wandering the halls of the hotel in search of coffee. I couldn't help but notice staff members setting up what appeared to be an incredible party. There was a stage for a band, tables with beautiful linens and gorgeous centerpiece, two bars at each end of the room and long tables along the walls with easels nearby. When I asked one of the staff what they were setting up for, they said it was a *bereavement event* planned for that evening. A *bereavement event*? They explained that they were preparing for what an undertaker would refer to as a memorial service, but this was on a level of professional staging that no funeral home could ever achieve. Or could it?

The concept of *bereavement events* is breaking the mold cast by the majority of traditional undertakers. Rather than walking into a floral smelling, low-lit, dark-carpeted, somber room filled with sad people, consumers are now wanting something uplifting, happy and most importantly, celebratory as they honor a life lived. Since a majority of funeral homes are not yet offering this option today, people are seeking outside vendors to make it happen. Fortunately, some contemporary undertakers are open to this concept and are now offering similar tribute events to suit your needs. These unique *tribute centers* (my term) are something

relatively new to the funeral industry. After much research, they have learned from the *bereavement event* that outside vendors offer, and now provide, a much more relaxed atmosphere at events families and friends are hosting. For example, where are most of us comfortable standing while visiting a friend's home? The kitchen, right? These modern-day *tribute centers* offer a kitchen feel to the office where you meet the undertaker. No more round table in a dark room surrounded by urns and caskets. Consumers now find themselves in a room that has a Pottery Barn and Williams Sonoma feel, with coffee, appetizers and even a high-top table to provide the feel of home. In addition, these modernized facilities have a plasma TV around nearly every corner and state-of-the-art technology piping audio and visual media throughout the building. These facilities have revolutionized funeral service into an opportunity for friends and family to enter a comforting atmosphere. In other words, a small but growing number of modern-day undertakers have gone against the grain in order to adapt to the needs of today's consumer.

So what does this mean to you, the modern consumer? When it comes to purchasing a funeral or cremation for a loved one, you can look at it in an entirely different way if you wish. Often, this means that the focus shifts away from the means of disposition (i.e. burial or cremation) and now toward what's really important – honoring a life lived. Today many undertakers are still trying to get consumers to buy that casket, hold a visitation and even have a traditional funeral ceremony that was the norm when their grandparents were in business. In reality, there is a large portion of the population that wants something different, and today contemporary firms are starting to appear to offer just that. More families are selecting cremation or unique celebrations that give them the flexibility and creativity to hold that special celebration. If you are one of those consumers who wants something different than what you've seen in the past, for either a cremation or burial, you are in luck. Seek out one of these contemporary firms and learn how a funeral service of the past, can be transformed into a *remembrance tribute* of today!

Ryan, owner, supervising mortician and preplanning counselor at Lasting Tributes on Bestgate Road in Annapolis, offers solutions to high-cost funerals. He can be reached at 410.897.4852 or Ryan@LastingTributesFuneralCare.com

