

Mortuary Management

The Leading Source for Information in Funeral Service

News updates for the week of March 6, 2012

Mortuaries vs. Cemeteries: Tighter and tougher relationships...

By Ron Hast

"Families more often now tell us they must use pre-arrangement funds identified for a funeral to cover all related expenses involved in the funeral. For example, when it is determined that opening and closing costs at the cemetery have not been considered, requests to adjust original choices are considered to eliminate some of them to cover cemetery charges. They can delete the flowers or select a less-expensive casket. They may arrange for a gravesite service only, or eliminate the evening visitation."

"We have families change their arrangement to cremation, eliminating their originally chosen casket, and burial of the urn in their grave. Then they discover the cemetery will charge a full opening and closing fee for the urn if a lawn crypt vault has been pre-installed. Cemeteries all seem to be inflexible with charges and adaptations."

"It can be difficult, when we as funeral directors offer a discounted, guaranteed prepaid amount, to cover the requests of the initial arrangements only to renegotiate and reduce services to recover charges to spend elsewhere — namely unexpected charges at a cemetery."

The above are examples recently shared with us as a more common experience with at-need arrangements. Here's another:

"Fortunately, when we realize this problem is occurring at the time of at-need arrangements, we are able to suggest conversion to suitable cremation-oriented casket, or a 'rental casket,' with all appearances as an attractive full casket typically made of wood — and fully functional for visitation, procession to and from church or elsewhere for formalities — to return to the funeral home for removal of the casket inner liner and the decedent. The body is then transported for cremation privately, or witness presence if preferred. This eliminates everything at a cemetery. We don't even have to hand them an interment permit, giving them access to the family information for further promotion for sales of markers, floral vases, and potential grave sales for family members. This activity, in our experience, has been win-win for the families we serve, amid the potential impositions and surprise charges from cemeteries."

Also, cemeteries offering caskets and other typically mortuary-related items might be inconvenient, restrictive or more costly to families as compared to package arrangements offered by most funeral providers, and unknown to the client family.

We can only conclude that cemeteries will, in the long run, be the losers. There are only so many, usually predictable, deaths and potential interments per any region within a cemetery. When present circumstances, considering families that become transient when children become adults and relocate out of the region of a long-past family commitment to a cemetery, are fractured — trouble begins. Present information is surfacing relative to cemeteries recognizing insolvency is near or potentially anticipated. It may be time for a reevaluation of standards and staunch principles of the past.

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