

Mausoleums and Columbaria

Roundtable



Betsy Baldry



Thomas Burrington



David Dahl

Cremation is having an impact on all segments of the death-care industry, including mausoleum and columbarium construction. We talked to industry professionals Betsy Baldry, marketing director for Dakota Granite; Thomas Burrington, vice president of mausoleum and feature sales for Rock of Ages; and David Dahl, president of Milne Construction, about how the industry has changed, what families want and what the future looks like.

How has the mausoleum and columbaria business changed over the past five years?

Baldry: As a fabricator of mausoleums and columbaria we have steadily increased production of these buildings. These are memorial products that will continue to be in high demand. The

biggest change we have seen is the growing need for large-scale buildings to accommodate not just family cremated remains but community as well. Many large-scale memorial areas have been installed in highly populated city cemeteries and in smaller communities as well. This is an area of large growth, and it is exciting to be

part of creating these tranquil memorial areas.

Burrington: The past five years have seen a dramatic increase in Internet brokers and importers. The quality of product in the marketplace has suffered as a result.

Dahl: There has been an economic stall in inventory needs. We saw smaller jobs with more phasing options.

What are you hearing from cemeterians about what they want and need?

Burrington: They are looking for a quality product at a fair price with a warranty that protects them.

Dahl: Cemeterians want smaller structures. They want to show value and full service while providing unique lasting products for the next generation.

Baldry: We are asked by cemeterians about additional options they can provide with the increasing number of cremation burials. Cemeteries continue investing in above-ground cremation memorials that create areas of reflection and meditation. These areas have a small real estate footprint and provide an additional option to families.

We expect the creation of above-ground memorial areas to continue to be invested in by both large and small cemeteries across the country in order to provide additional options.

There's a lot of talk about the need for personalization in every step of the funeral process. How are you answering the call?

Dahl: Milne has been providing full-service design/build solutions for years, and we are always looking for new lasting products.

Two of those new products are now endorsed and sold by Milne Co.'s Life Memories: they are Pet Memories and Heaven's Address.

Baldry: Our company is not directly involved in the steps of a family's funeral process, but personalization is important to us. Personalization in creating a memorial certainly plays a role in design and ultimately the end result of fabrication. The close relationships we have with our customers and communication during the design and creative process is our key to answering the call and providing families with a personalized memorial. Dakota Granite is a proud partner of professional memorialists.

Burrington: As designers and fabricators, our business was founded on personalization. The

memorial-mausoleum is the only lasting symbol after the funeral. We approach each project as telling a family's story in stone.

Cremation rates continue to rise. How is this impacting your business?

Burrington: The decision to cremate does not preclude a family's ability to memorialize, whether it is in a community columbarium, a family memorial or a private mausoleum. We now devote a larger portion of our design team's resources to cremation products.

Dahl: We are seeing more requests for custom-style niches with art glass and lighting. Life's Memories product works well for niches.

Baldry: Cremation is impacting our business, and we have added different product designs in order to offer various choices of cremation memorials. Traditional headstones and granite benches have the capability of being designed in such a way to incorporate a cremation urn. Placing remains in a columbarium is not the only option. People are unique in their personal requests and ideas, and we continue to be open and creative in order to meet those needs.

Many cemeteries are – or will be – finding themselves with limited space in the future. How will they be able to manage this challenge going forward?

Baldry: The challenge of limited space has led many cemeteries to find a variety of solutions. Creating areas within the cemetery for community buildings has been one valuable solution to this issue. We believe going forward these types of memorial areas will play an important role in providing additional space for memorialization. Dakota Granite has designed mausoleum buildings with 96 +/- crypts and columbaria with 320 +/-

niches to meet this specific need. These types of buildings utilize vertical space and allow cemeteries to provide the necessary memorialization area to additional families.

Burrington: Areas not normally considered for memorialization will have to be utilized, such as curbing or benches along roadways, cremation gardens in wooded areas and above ground interments on areas with ledge; community columbaria are also an efficient vehicle to maximize revenue within a limited space.

Dahl: Cemeteries will need to review their master plans and perhaps acquire land. I believe forms of limited tenure will also come into play. I have also coined the term "deferred disposition." I believe in the United States we could write in the deeds if families choose to reuse a crypt or grave space by exhumation then cremation after three decades or so.

Where is the industry headed?

Dahl: I see economic strength in the market that will spur competition for unique products that will draw the end user back to the cemetery.

Baldry: Our industry is going to continue to create new products and designs in order to provide personalization for memorials. The baby boomers' desire to create non-traditional memorials will continue to challenge innovative design and fabrication.

Cremation will continue to rise, and I believe more and more churches and cemeteries will build areas for final resting places for the cremated remains of their members.

Burrington: Cremation rates will continue to rise, but we are seeing that more families choosing cremation are discovering that they want and need to memorialize. This should result in an increase in cremation gardens and community columbaria. •