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The
Greening
of **Funeral**
Service



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Embracing Change

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Foreword

When I started Passages International over 20 years ago, the mission was simple: funeral homes needed more dignified and eco-friendly options. We offered cremation products to families who didn't see value in a permanent urn but felt underwhelmed by the black plastic box they would otherwise receive after cremation. These families intended to do something with the cremated remains, but funeral homes didn't seem to care what that would be. Traditional burial was still king of the industry, but the big change to cremation had already begun.

This was a year before the Toyota Prius was first offered in the U.S. Since then, most industries have seen dramatic shifts toward more eco-friendly practices. The funeral industry is very lucky in that we curate events to honor someone's life as they lived it. We aren't striving to suddenly change someone's values; we instead serve to represent the values they already have. This means the answer to the question "What will be next for funerals?" is already out there for us. We simply need to look around at the people in our communities and show that we see how they live, we appreciate their values, and we understand them.

I encourage you to think of your own business as you read on. What has your business done to show those in your community that you are listening to them? Today, people are looking for something different, it's no longer "one size fits all." We need to meet the families where they are and align our offerings with their values, not only our own, if we want to remain relevant and in step with our communities.



P A S S A G E S*
Embracing Change

*Darren Crouch, president
Passages International Inc.*



Green Survey

By Patti Martin Bartsche

In 2008, Kates-Boylston Publications conducted a first-of-its-kind green consumer study. At the time, it was inevitable that if you opened a newspaper, turned on the TV or browsed the internet, you would see something about “green” or “eco-friendly.”

While businesses were quick to respond to consumers’ evolving preferences for “green,” the funeral profession was taking a more measured approach, with many consumers not understanding the connection between “green” and funerals.

In fact, as the 2008 survey found, only 7% of respondents had ever attended a green burial. When asked “If you were offered the choice of a ‘green’ burial (no embalming, no metal casket), would this be something you would consider?” 43% said yes.

What a difference 13 years makes.

Consumers are not only continuing to embrace “green” in life, but increasing numbers are opting for green in death, according to a new consumer survey conducted by Kates-Boylston.

The 2021 Green Funerals and Burials Survey found that 51% of respondents have attended a green burial. When asked

whether a green burial would be something they would consider, if offered, more than 84% of respondents said “yes.”

Demographics

Total responses: **500**

Age groups:

25 - 34 (25.8%)

35 - 44 (45%)

45 - 54 (16.8%)

> 54 (12.4%)

Household Income:

Middle II, High II, High III, Middle I, High I

Country: **United States**

Gender: **Female (45%), Male (55%)**



“That’s good news, but I’m not really surprised,” Ed Bixby, president of the Green Burial Council said. “Back in 2008, there had not been a lot of natural burials conducted. That’s all changed. In the last 18 months, we’ve seen the largest increase since we started offering natural burials. People are seeing for themselves what it is all about ... they have a better understanding what it means to be green in death.”

Darren Crouch, owner of Passages International Inc., agrees.

“People are seeking out green in every other area of their daily lives,” said Crouch, who was elected to the Green Burial Council board of directors in 2018. “I’m not surprised that they want a greener option in death.”

That wasn’t always the case.

“I think (when the first survey was done) people were (already) living a greener life,” said Crouch. “They just didn’t know they could have a greener death.”

When he founded Passages in 1999, green and nontraditional funeral options were still in their infancy.

Crouch’s original concept was to provide funeral directors with a more dignified and profitable, eco-friendly temporary container in which to return cremated remains when a family declined an urn.

In those early days, Crouch recalled, funeral directors would tell him that “no one was asking for green.”

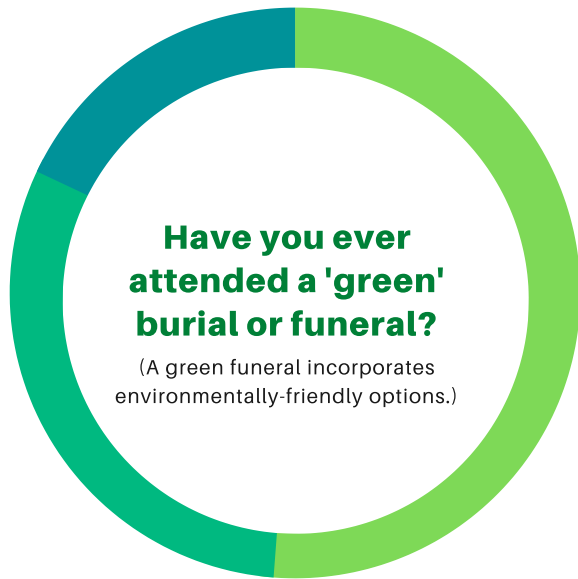
Which then led Crouch to ask whether the funeral director talked to the family about green options.

“The answer was usually no,” Crouch said.

These days, not talking about green funeral and natural burial options could have a negative impact on a firm.



YES: 63.95% NO: 36.05%



YES: 51.2%
NO: 30.8%
NOT SURE: 18%



EXTREMELY FAMILIAR: 36.4%
MODERATELY FAMILIAR: 35.6%
NOT FAMILIAR AT ALL: 28%

“It can’t be about what a funeral professional thinks a family wants; it has to be what the family wants,” Crouch said. “Many individuals are living their lives mindful of their impact on earth. When the time comes, these individuals will likely look for funeral homes with the same environmental consciousness. If you’re not talking about green and natural burial, families will find someone who is.”

While green consumers may have once been considered a niche market, most consumers now have some form of sustainable requirements integrated into their purchase habits.

The 2019 Retail and Sustainability Survey showed that more than two-thirds of the respondents consider sustainability when making a purchase and are willing to pay more for sustainable products. And the A.T. Kearney’s Earth Day 2019 study similarly found that more than 70% of consumers consider their impact on the environment when shopping.

Does this desire to be environmentally friendly continue into death? The answer is an overwhelming yes, according to the Kates-Boylston survey, with more than 68% saying it was extremely important (39.8%) or very important (28.4%). An additional 22.6% said it was moderately important while only 9.2% said it was not important at all.

Robert Prout, co-owner of Prout Funeral Home in Verona, New Jersey, says the figures should not come as a surprise to anyone in funeral service.

“The public is already there, and as an industry, we haven’t even approached the

curve yet," Prout pointed out. "Funeral service cannot continue to stick its head in the sand."

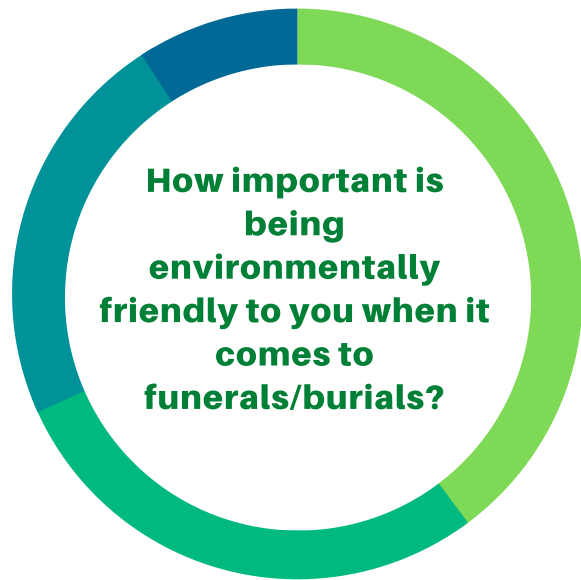
For nearly a century, the Prout family has been serving families in northern New Jersey. The firm's decision to offer green funerals and natural burials was a natural extension of what the Prout family had already been doing to limit their environmental impact, including installing 150 solar panels in 2005 to power the funeral home and getting involved in soil conservation efforts. "I even bought a Prius in 2005 and kept it on the road for 14 years," Prout added. "Green is really a lifestyle decision for us."

Prout likens green burials to cremation in 1960. "You had funeral directors saying, 'My families would never choose anything like it (cremation),' " he said. "And guess what? Forty years later, guess whose families are choosing it?"

It's a comparison that Barbara Kemmis, executive director of the Cremation Association of North America, understands.

"There were many who said that cremation would never gain acceptance, and as well all know, the cremation rate is now over 50%," she said. "What we are seeing now are a number of funeral homes, cemeteries and combination operations looking for ways to make their businesses greener to target this population for whom green values are important in life and express that those green values in their death."

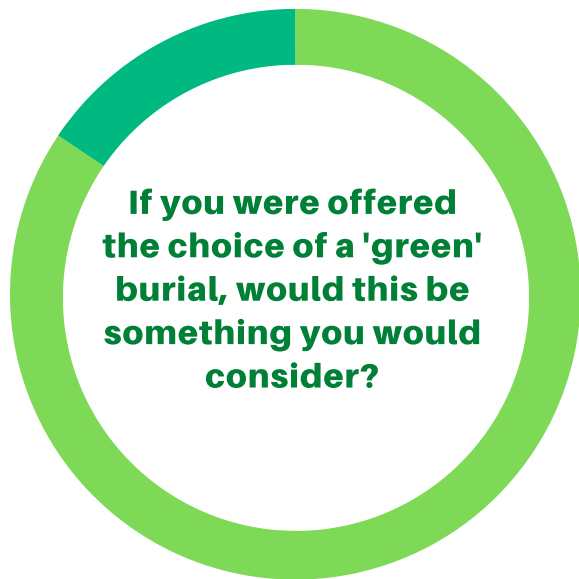
While the Green Burial Council defines green burial "as a way of caring for the dead with minimal environmental impact that aids in the conservation of natural resources,



EXTREMELY IMPORTANT: 39.8%
VERY IMPORTANT: 28.4%
MODERATELY IMPORTANT: 22.6%
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT: 9.2%



EXTREMELY IMPORTANT: 48.4%
VERY IMPORTANT: 30.6%
MODERATELY IMPORTANT: 13.6%
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT: 7.4%



If you were offered the choice of a 'green' burial, would this be something you would consider?

YES: 84.4%. NO: 15.6%

reduction of carbon emissions, protection of worker health and the restoration and/or preservation of habitat," Prout and Crouch acknowledged that "green" is a term open to individual interpretation.

"Many people view cremation as a green option," said Prout, whose firm was the first in New Jersey to receive Green Burial Council certification, "but a true natural burial, in many regards, is more environmentally-friendly than cremation."

But that doesn't mean that green is an all or nothing concept.

"Some people are under the impression that they have to be wrapped in a shroud and placed straight in the ground," Prout said. "That's just not true. There are varying shades of green. It could be using a sustainable casket or choosing formaldehyde-free embalming. There are a variety of options available to families."

Those options could involve being interred in a traditional cemetery buried in a shroud or a biodegradable casket, Prout said. "This is where funeral directors need to step up, not just to educate their families ... but themselves. Before saying 'no,' they need to gather all the information to present to families."

According to the survey, there are many things families interested in green want to learn about, including environmentally-friendly burial offerings (58%), biodegradable/green caskets (56%), green memorialization products (44%), burial in a green cemetery (41%) and biodegradable urns (38%).

These numbers should serve as a wake-up call for funeral professionals who are content to continue "business as usual."

"What we need to do is bring green to the forefront in our service and product offerings," Kemmis said.



If you were to plan a green funeral, would you contact a funeral home to help you plan it?

YES: 85% NO: 15%

“So many cremation families have indicated to us that they might have selected a scattering tube or biodegradable urn if they had been on display,” she added. “Consumers are driving green, and they don’t want to settle.”

Crouch agrees.

“Bringing green products into the selection room is necessary,” he said. “Think of the funeral experience for a family like going to an automobile dealership. Families should be able to pick and choose ... they should be able to see all their options.”

For Crouch that doesn’t necessarily mean separating those choices. “You don’t have to put the ‘green’ products in one place and the traditional products on the other side,” he said. “You can put all the caskets together, all the urns together, as an example. Let the families look, ask questions about the wicker casket, biodegradable urns and scattering tubes, and give them the information they want – and need.”

Personalization continues to grow in importance for families. In the 2008 survey, 60% of respondents said personalization was very important and 25% said it was somewhat important. In comparison, respondents in the 2021 survey said personalization was extremely important (48%), very important (31%) or somewhat important (14%).

When it comes to personalization, it’s important to understand that many “green” families are looking for more than just products ... they’re looking for involvement, said Brian Flowers, managing funeral director and green burial coordinator, Moles Farewell Tributes – Bayview Chapel & Greenacres Memorial Park in Washington.

“A natural burial or greener funeral service gives families a closure that is probably more impactful,” said Flowers, a former Green Burial Council president. “Natural burial allows families to become participants in the care for their dead ... and nothing is more personal than that.”

Flowers came to Moles Farewell Tributes and Greenacres Memorial Park to develop The Meadow at Greenacres Memorial Park in 2009, western Washington’s first certified green burial ground.

Families can lay their loved ones to rest in a serene and natural environment, Flowers said, which is more in-line with how they lived their lives. “It’s a way to give people the opportunity to naturally return people to the earth,” he pointed out.

And that, Flowers said, is what many families who choose green want.

“Families choose green because of the environmental benefits,” he said. “And from my experience, families who are part of a natural burial come away with a deep sense of meaning from the experience because they have been a part of something that was not consumer driven but was tangible and meaningful to them and the way they – and their loved one – live their lives.”

Prout puts it this way: “Natural or a shade of green burial is a continuation of their lifestyle – to all of a sudden stop and say you can’t have that in their death ritual just doesn’t make sense to them.”

Opting for a “green” death experience doesn’t mean that families don’t value the role of funeral service or funeral directors. In fact, according to the 2021 survey, 85% of respondents said they would contact a funeral director if they were to plan a green burial.

That makes sense to Julia Prout, a fourth-generation funeral director and Prout’s daughter.

“My generation, we’ve been accustomed to being able to choose reusable bags and environmentally friendly lightbulbs – the steel straws over the plastic straws – having that choice is just commonplace,” she said.

“It just makes sense to have that choice when you’re looking at funeral options as well,” Julia Prout added. “Most people in my generation, when they become the age when they need to start making funeral arrangements – either for themselves or for their parents – they’re just going to assume those options are readily available because they’ve

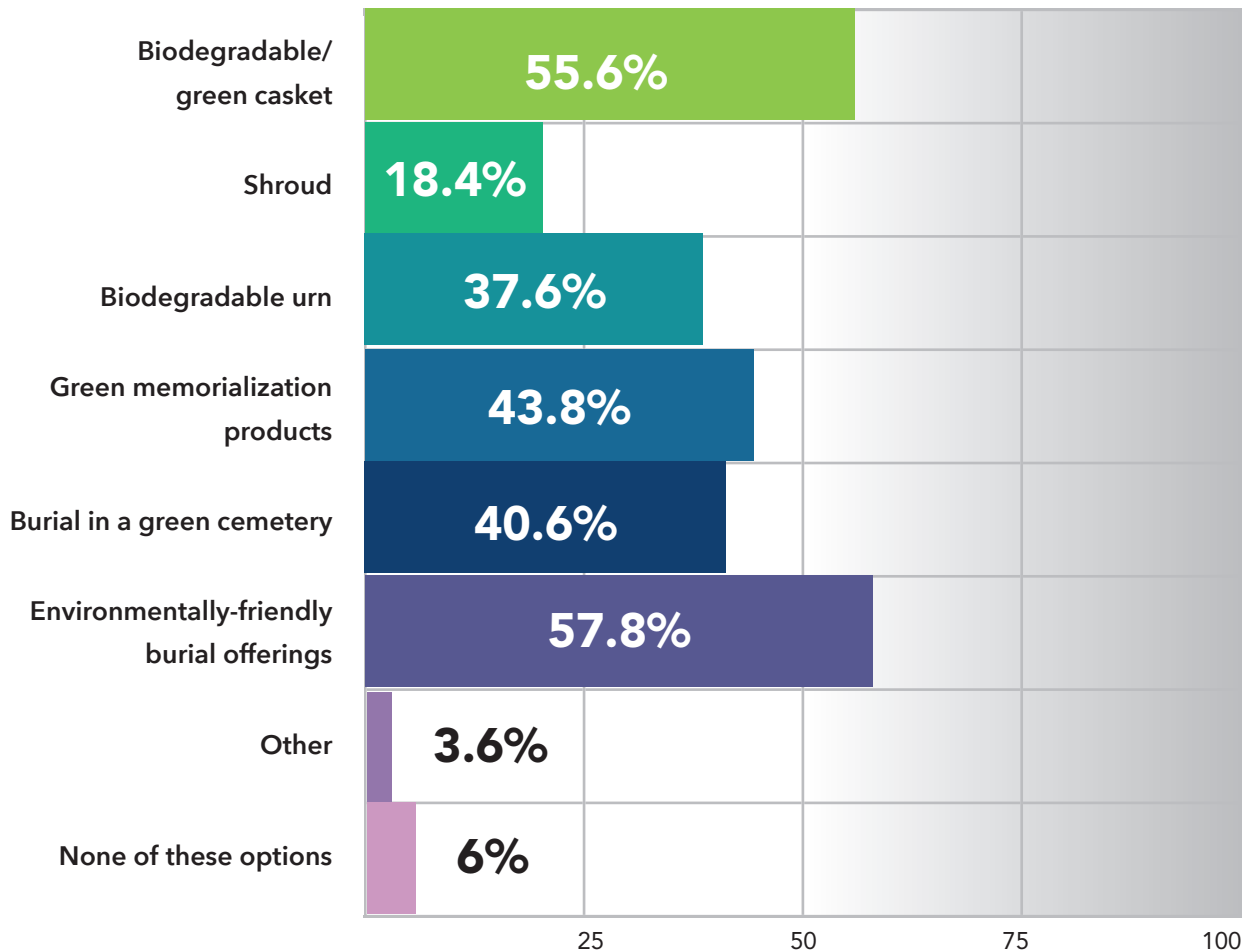
been readily available for most of their adult lives ... and they are going to contact a funeral director to help them.”

About this survey

The 2008 consumer survey was sent out to 400 people over the age of 50. The respondents were overwhelmingly female (71%) and 64% took home a yearly income of more than \$50,000.

The 2021 survey was conducted online and includes responses from 500 ranging from 25 to 54-plus (146 were between the ages of 45 and older). By gender, respondents were nearly split, 45% female, 55% male. Forty-four percent of respondents made between \$50,000 and \$99,999. •

If you were to choose green burial for yourself or loved one, which of the following would you be interested in learning more about?





A Conversation with Darren Crouch

By Patti Martin Bartsche

Since co-founding Passages International in 1999, Darren Crouch has been on a mission to help funeral homes meet the changing needs of families. Data shows families increasingly want non-traditional and greener products, and Passages offers funeral homes the largest variety of eco-friendly urns, scatter tubes and caskets. Twenty-plus years later, the company continues to innovate and introduce new products that help funeral homes better align with modern family preferences.

You co-founded Passages International in 1999 when the demand for green funerals was in its infancy. What is the state of green funerals today?

Wow, HUGE changes! Demand has skyrocketed, fueled by the move toward sustainability in our broader economy. Hertz Rental Car Co. is committing to buying 100,000 Tesla electric vehicles, General Motors plans to completely phase out internal combustion engines by 2035, and United Airlines is shooting to be 100% green by 2050. We live in a different world. Families expect greener options in all areas of their lives, including funerals. Today, according to the Kates-Boylston Green Survey 2021, as many as 92% of families say they would be

interested in greener options when it comes to funerals. Green funerals are no longer a niche that funeral professionals can afford to ignore. This is an opportunity for funeral professionals and not a threat. It is only a threat if ignored.



In the early days, what were those conversations like with funeral professionals and cemeterians?

In the late '90s, the Toyota Prius was the only hybrid vehicle option and Whole Foods was one of the few places to get organic produce. Green funerals were a pretty hard sell. Because families deal with death so infrequently (on average every seven years), they are generally not informed of all of their options when they walk into a funeral home. Combine this with their state of mind during this time of crisis and the mainstream funeral industry's unwillingness to deviate from the status quo. Bottom line, families were not asking for this despite increased interest, and consequently, funeral professionals thought that there was little demand.

Steve Jobs put it best when he said something along the lines of "consumers don't know what they want until YOU show it to them." This is even more important in the funeral industry, given my previous points.

Can you pinpoint a time period when consumers began to more fully embrace the concept of green funerals and green burials?

I think that biodegradable and alternative, eco-friendly urns gained widespread acceptance first. Most funeral homes, by the mid-2000s, realized that families want to do more than keep remains at home, or inter in a cemetery niche. It is really only in the last two to three years that woven caskets, shrouds, and other eco-friendly burial options have started to take off. With cremation rates spiking, the industry is seeing green burial as a way to sell services, caskets and cemetery plots.

Passages designs and produces many of its own products. Can you talk a little bit about how a Passages' product comes to market?

There are really two ways. We either see a need in the market or go searching for products that fit our business model. In the first scenario, we have a team that includes our in-house graphic design and marketing folks, along with customer service and operations input. This team will conceptualize and design products that we then decide whether to produce in-house or outsource. Once we have the product in production, then it's a matter of marketing and selling it through our existing customer base and new leads generated via trade show exhibits, print and online advertising, and social media efforts.

Today's consumer is the driving force behind green – from the cars they drive to the clothes they wear to many of the products they purchase. While many businesses have adapted what they sell to meet that demand, funeral service has not reacted as quickly. Why do you think this is?

There is a lot of influence from the vendors in the industry that have sold the products required for a traditional funeral. Casket companies are trying to sell new corner features and inserts into the casket lids in an effort to get the consumer on board. This, however, is like trying to put all the bells and whistles onto a pickup truck when a mother of four toddlers wants to buy a minivan. It's not going to happen. Many of the long-time vendors to funeral homes, like casket, vault and embalming fluid companies, have long-standing relationships with funeral homes, and funeral directors often stay loyal, paying the heavy price of not being in sync with the customer. Basically, what funeral homes are selling is no longer what families want to buy

and, consequently, they see little value. So they will not buy at all or will buy the cheapest thing available. We need to build value back and offering green options is a great way to do that.

What does it mean to be a socially and environmentally responsible business?

Passages is a green company, and not just a producer and seller of green products. We strive to be as green as possible, knowing that everything we do will have some environmental impact. The question is always how can we eliminate that impact or at the very least minimize it? Passages is always looking to get third-party approval from organizations like the Green Burial Council, Traidcraft, and the World Fair Trade Organization. This says, "Don't just take it from us. We are getting independent verification." This is often expensive and time-consuming, but we want to be transparent because that is what more informed consumers (which most green consumers are) want. We want to do more than just sell products, and to have an impact beyond just generating profits. Leave the planet better than we found it, be accountable to all stakeholders, including employees, vendors, the local community, the environment, and not just customers or investors and owners.

Many funeral professionals think that Passages just sells caskets and urns. What other ways are you able to help funeral directors?

I am glad you asked this. We partner with funeral homes to help them address business problems that many often do not even realize exist. As business owners, it is often difficult to step back and work on, rather than in, the business. We partner with funeral

homes to help them remain relevant by better aligning them with where the modern funeral consumer is. We position products to help build value back into the funeral.

Many families are unwilling to part with their hard-earned cash because they see little value in what they perceive the funeral home's services and product offerings to be. By offering products that the family is comfortable with (and often think are "cool"), we can give families tangible reasons why they should do something a certain way. For example, we have found that the vast majority of cremations are using a cardboard box to contain the decedent. This has no value and therefore can only be charged at \$100 or \$200. By switching to a Passages Simple Bamboo Container, families are still getting "affordable" and "simple," but still know that there is a story and a value behind it. Thus, making a \$495-\$695 price tag a much better value for the funeral home, while offering the family a more dignified and meaningful cremation experience for their loved one.

Is there a disconnect between funeral directors and families choosing cremation? In other words, many times when cremation is talked about there's not a lot of talk about the types of urns available?

Yes, there is. The funeral professional needs to move away from selling an urn product and move toward selling an experience. What experience would best honor a loved one and the life they lived? If you can paint the picture of the experience a family can have, the cost of a product enabling them to have that experience becomes less relevant. We have found that families are having amazing experiences using Passages products.

Take the example of a family that purchased a Biodegradable Turtle Urn, painted and decorated it, and when they had the committal service at sea, a real sea turtle swam up alongside the urn. That is a priceless experience, and the family will never forget that (or the funeral home that sold it).

What would a conversation between a funeral director and a family sound like when talking about green options?

Learning about the deceased and the family, the life that they lived, and what was important to them will have to drive the conversation. At a minimum, ALL of the options should be presented. Traditional burial or green burial, flame or water cremation – these are the basics, and from there, the funeral director can talk about the benefits of green options. The story behind the products and the benefits they bring to the living, in terms of encouraging participation by the family, should be discussed. The more the family can be involved (if they want) the more they will be able to come to terms with the loss and feel good about the decisions they made to align the funeral with the life their loved one lived.

Funeral professionals need to be informed about the products. How are they made? Where are they made? What makes them sustainable? You want to be the expert and demonstrate you know what you are talking about. It is important to have choices for the family. You would not have one metal and one wood casket in your selection room, nor should you have one woven or green casket. Have multiple urn and casket options made from different materials and price them at various strategic price points.

You are a big proponent of fair trade. Why is this so important to you?

It is important to go beyond just green. How can we have an impact on all stakeholders? We want to ensure that overseas staff and vendors are paid a fair wage, labor standards are high, and that child labor and long hours are not acceptable. We are helping to provide consistent, reliable employment for workers in otherwise economically depressed areas of the world. These issues are not just important to Passages, but to our customers and families. Even though not all our products are fair-trade certified, we take the same approach wherever and with whomever we do business.

Gazing into your crystal ball, if we were to talk about green funerals and burials five years from now, what would the conversation be about?

I am hoping that it will be about how we are so thrilled that the industry handled green funerals differently than cremation. We all know that as cremation was increasing in popularity nationally, it was discouraged by many in the industry as “the other.” This really taught families that “direct” cremation was an option for which you pay nothing and get nothing. This has really hurt the industry and is a harsh lesson that you cannot dictate to or ignore the market. Providers need to listen to the consumer and not the other way around. Right now, consumers are indicating that they see value in greener options, and they will pay for them, but greener options need to be an integral part of a funeral homes’ strategy. In five years, we will look back and see progressive firms understanding and acting on this growth opportunity and remaining securely positioned as leaders in their respective markets.



Strategies for Serving Today's Greener Customer

By Patti Martin Bartsche

If you think being green is just a fad ... think again.

Nearly 70% of consumers in the U.S. and Canada think it is important that a brand is sustainable or eco-friendly, according to a recent study by IBM and the National Retail Federation.

The research polled about 19,000 customers from 28 countries, ranging from Gen Z to baby boomers (ages 18-73) to find out how individual shopping decisions are changing.

North American respondents, who numbered 3,500, increasingly prefer sustainable brands. Sixty-nine percent of environmentally conscious buyers willingly pay a premium for recycled products, and more than half of these buyers are ready to change their shopping habits to reduce negative impact on the environment.

Before you start thinking that this only applies to the cars we drive, the clothing we wear, the lighting we install in our homes and the places we shop, consider this:

- The 2021 Green Funerals and Burial Survey conducted by Kates-Boylston Publications found that nearly 91% of respondents believe that it is extremely, very or

moderately important to be environmentally friendly when it comes to funerals and burials.

- The survey also found that, given the choice, almost 85% of respondents would consider a green burial.

- Just as importantly, 85% of respondents said they would contact a funeral director if they were to plan a green funeral.

In very real terms, people who are living a green life also want a greener death. After leading an eco-friendly lifestyle, why shouldn't they leave this world in the same fashion that they have lived in it?

Just like cremation before it (which many in funeral service dismissed as a fad less than a decade ago), green isn't going anywhere. In fact, the popularity of green funerals will likely increase in the future.

So, what does a funeral home or cemetery need to do to meet this consumer need?

Kates-Boylston Publications and Passages International are exploring ways funeral homes and cemeteries can make themselves more attractive to eco-friendly consumers

The Greening of Funeral Service

they hope to serve – today and in the future.

It's important to recognize that funeral service features varying "shades" of green. In general, green practices include offering alternatives to chemical embalming, eco-friendly products including biodegradable caskets and urns, other services and products that appeal to environmentally conscious consumers, as well green burial options. The range of green funeral options your firm provides will depend on a number of factors, including consumer preferences, funeral home capabilities, and local cemetery practices and regulations.

At the same time, it's also important to realize that you do not have to do a deep dive into the darkest shade of green when you're beginning your green transformation. By starting with a lighter shade and progressing gradually to deeper shades (if you so choose), you will become the go-to provider in your community.

In simple terms, there is no downside to greening your business.

Whether your funeral home or cemetery has green practices in place now or is just beginning to discover the advantages of going green, there is no better time to take a look at how you're running your business and look for ways to better serve the environmentally conscious consumers that will come your way.

It all starts with education – for yourself and the families you serve.

A green funeral incorporates environmentally-friendly options and may include no embalming or embalming with formaldehyde-free products; the use of sustainable biodegradable clothing, shroud or casket; using recycled paper products and a natural or green burial.

In a natural or green burial, the body is buried, without embalming, in a natural setting. If a shroud or casket is used, it must be



Bamboo cremation containers are a perfect first step into offering green options. (Photo courtesy of Passages International)

Families appreciate your effort to serve them better. Nearly 91% of respondents consider the environmental impact of funerals or burials important to some degree. Funeral homes that have replaced cardboard containers with bamboo containers have reported an immediate increase in family satisfaction on post-funeral surveys.

biodegradable, nontoxic and of sustainable material. A natural or green may also mean burial without embalming, in a biodegradable casket without a vault, if permitted by a cemetery.

A green cemetery does not permit vaults, non-biodegradable caskets or embalming chemicals. It uses no herbicides, pesticides or irrigation for maintenance of the cemetery grounds. Materials used at a green cemetery must meet the goal of replenishing the earth.

So how do you start?

A good starting point is to develop a plan to make your business – whether it's a funeral home or cemetery – greener. Smart shades, renewable fuel sources and good ventilation will increase the green ratio of your building. CFL and LED lights cost more than incandescent bulbs, but last up to 25 times longer and use less energy. Refillable ink cartridges can limit the amount of waste. The use of reusable water bottles and mugs

over plastic and Styrofoam can be encouraged.

And while paperwork is a necessary function of business, it doesn't mean you have to use it in every process. Enter the digital world: The cloud, Google Drive and similar platforms give you the ability to cut down on paper dramatically while still safekeeping important documents. And as the pandemic showed funeral service, tools such as DocuSign give businesses an alternative to paper signatures; recipients can easily read and digitally sign documents on a secure platform, reducing the need for paper.

Once you've started on the green pathway with the operational side of your business, it's time to examine ways you can put on a greener face for the families you want to serve.

Make no mistake, while funeral service has evolved dramatically over the years, families are still relying on funeral professionals to care for their deceased loved ones. As our Green Funerals & Burial Survey found, 85% of people planning a green funeral would contact a funeral home to help them plan it.

What do families who choose a green funeral or burial want for themselves or a loved one? According to our survey, they're interested in learning more about:

- Environmentally-friendly burial offerings (57.8%)
- Biodegradable/green caskets (55.6%)
- Green memorialization products (43.8%)
- Burial in a green cemetery (40.6%)
- Biodegradable urns (37.6%)

Armed with this information, your first stop should be your selection room. What does it look like? Is it filled with wooden and metal caskets, many of which haven't sold in years? Are your cremation products visible or are they hidden – or worse yet, only available for viewing in a catalog?

These days, "it's what we've always carried" isn't going to work. If a family is interested in a wicker casket and you only have metal or wood options, they're either going to opt for the cheapest option (and be dissatisfied) or go someplace else.

So, take a good long look at what you have – and what you're missing. With more than 50% of families interested in green options, shouldn't your selection room reflect consumers' preferences?

Consider integrating more nontraditional products like wicker caskets, biodegradable urns and scattering tubes into your selection space. Integrate them among your traditional caskets and urns to foster conversations with families.

It's likely that families have not seen these nontraditional products in-person, so they're going to be curious. Educate yourself and be prepared when a family asks, "Tell me more."

As the Green Funerals and Burial Survey found, 92% of families consider the environmental impact to be important. What they want to know is if the product is fair trade, has a low carbon footprint or is sustainable. It's what they opt for in life ... and they want to be able to make the same choice in death.

The funeral profession has long touted the idea that every loved one is unique, and

their service should reflect who they were. By offering a variety of products – traditional and nontraditional, permanent and semi-permanent, biodegradable and sustainable – you are showing families that they have options.

And those options can – and should – hit all price points. Many times, families will end up choosing the least expensive option in a selection room, not because it is the cheapest, but because they do not see value in the products they are being offered.

The cardboard cremation container is a perfect example. If a loved one has chosen cremation and the only options under \$1,000 are some variation of cardboard, they are going to opt for the cheapest. Families want "simple" and "affordable" but also "dignified" – and would not want a loved one cremated in a cardboard box if better options, with tangible value were available.

Now what if there was another option? Passages, for example, offers two environmentally friendly cremation containers constructed from bamboo. The offerings give families a more dignified and green choice when choosing a container for a loved one's cremation, and help funeral directors elevate their standard of care and increase revenues.

Speaking about cremation, it's important to understand that, in general, it is not considered "green" in the truest definition of the term because the process uses nonrenewable fossil fuels and produces airborne emissions. At the same time, cremation does use fewer resources

than traditional disposition, and the options for interring or scattering the remains are growing every day.

As the trusted professional in your community, you have opportunity to help cremation families understand that in death they have a variety of cremation options that are more eco-friendly. Choosing a cleaner burning container like bamboo or willow will leave less residue, burn at a lower temperature and eliminate many of the toxic emissions that concern residents living near a crematory.

To appeal to their greener side, talk about the biodegradable and sustainable urn options, including scattering tubes or urns that will biodegrade naturally when buried or placed in water.

A variety of options means more choices for families ... and additional revenue streams for your business. It cannot be stressed enough that families are willing to

pay for products if they perceive value in that product. It happens every day. People are willing to spend money to purchase fair-trade chocolate bars and ethically made clothing even when mass-produced, commercially-made options are available. Why? Because of the perceived value of things like fair-trade certification.

Protecting the environment, preserving natural resources and conserving energy are all woven into the fabric of American life. As funeral professionals and cemeterians, you have the opportunity to weave that same eco-friendly mindset into the death experience.

Does this mean that traditional services should be pushed to the side? Absolutely not. Many people will continue to want to incorporate traditional aspects of a funeral into their services – they just want more choices.

When it comes to green, it's not a matter of "or;" it's about the "and." •



Bridging the Gap with Marketing

By Patti Martin Bartsche

It was in 2018 that Dan Katz, the recently retired president of LA ads, made this observation: If you're running a cemetery, you're facing two challenges: 1) communicating the meaning of a permanent setting to families choosing cremation, and 2) offering sufficient choices that intersect with the values of today's families.

Fast forward three years, and substitute green for cremation.

In increasing numbers, individuals are looking to live a greener life – and death.

As the 2021 Green Funerals and Burials Survey conducted for Kates-Boylston Publications found, 84.4% of respondents said if they were offered the choice of a 'green' burial, it would be something they would consider. In addition, respondents said they would be interested in learning more about environmentally-friendly burial options (57.8%), biodegradable/green caskets (55.6%), green memorialization products (43.8%), burial in a green cemetery (40.6%), biodegradable urns (37.6%) and shrouds (18.4%).

Of course, the first step in appealing to the green consumer is making a commitment to offer a green option for families,

whether that be a hybrid burial ground, natural burial ground or conservation burial ground following specific standards set forth by the Green Burial Council.

As outlined in last month's introductory story, there are ways being greener doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing proposition, you can start slowly, educating yourself and your staff about what green is – and isn't – and then opting for a shade of green – think light, medium, dark – you want your business to start at or take the next step to.

Listening to what families want is great ... but it's only great if families know what you're doing.

Think about it.

Most people probably were introduced to reusable shopping bags when they saw them at the checkout line at the local grocery store

“... when we rolled this (bamboo casket) out, our funeral directors all looked at it with a skeptic eye. Darren and the team at Passages came over and did some training with us and helped give some verbiage around what makes this product unique and different than other products that we do offer. And they started seeing the opportunity to add value ...”

**– Tom Antram, president
and CEO of French Funerals
and Cremations**

... and said to themselves something like, “I’m tired of throwing away those plastic bags, I think I’ll get a couple.” Perhaps over time they found themselves wanting an eco-friendlier option, perhaps choosing bags manufactured from recycled water bottles.

How did the customer learn about reusable bags in the first place? Strategic placement ... in other words, great marketing.

Make no mistake every business – including green cemeteries and burying grounds – need to have a marketing plan in place. While there may be a small percentage of people that are well educated on the green burial movement, a vastly larger number of individuals want to know more ... and that’s where marketing comes in.



Before unveiling any marketing strategy to the public, educate your staff. If they can't provide a basic definition of green burial, discuss why a family may want to consider green burial and the variety of options available, then you have some work to do. From a consumer perspective, not having someone be able to answer questions, provide accurate information and talk about value is the quickest way to lose a customer.

In days gone by, you could let families know about green offerings by advertising in church bulletins, local newspapers and through direct mail. While those are still acceptable ways to get your message out, there is no doubt that how to get in touch with customers has shifted. These days, people are searching online 24/7 for information ... and your website might be their first touchpoint.

So how good a job are you doing educating families? If you're a cemetery that offers a separate green burial section, do you have a page specifically focused on that green section?

That's exactly what West Laurel Hill Cemetery in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania, did with Nature's Sanctuary.

Established in 2008, after years of functioning as an urban dump site for the larger cemetery, the sanctuary's goal is to offer a green burial option for the community (intended to minimize the environmental impacts of death).

As Deborah Cassidy, director of sales, marketing and family services at West Laurel Hill Cemetery & Funeral Home explains,

West Laurel Hill was looking to restore the landscape to a sustainable, thriving ecosystem by assisting the space in an ecological succession – beginning as a meadow, advancing to a successional forest and eventually becoming a fully-formed woodland.

The 0.68-acre Nature's Sanctuary, nestled in the 187-acre cemetery, was, in 2018, the first cemetery to receive SITES certification and is the eighth in the country to receive SITES Gold certification. Administered by Green Business Certification Inc., SITES offers a comprehensive rating system designed to distinguish sustainable landscapes, measure their performance and elevate their values.

All of this information is easily accessible on the Nature's Sanctuary page on the West Laurel Hill website.

In addition, the page offers a photo gallery of Nature's Sanctuary, videos and links to the Green Burial Council and the SITES website.

Just as importantly, the cemetery had made connections with the media (television stations, newspapers, magazines) both within and outside the industry. This relationship allows the cemetery to keep readers up-to-date with its sustainability initiatives, just not within the cemetery, but throughout the company.

At Moles Farewell Tributes & Crematory and Greenacres Memorial Park in Washington state, there's information available for individuals looking to learn more about their green burial options at The Meadow Natural Burial Ground.

Brian Flowers, managing funeral director and green burial coordinator at the company's Bayview Chapel location, said there is no such thing as too much information when it comes to green burial.

Individuals coming to the cemetery's website will not only read about The Meadow's mission statement but also learn about burial containers, excavation and burial techniques, maintenance, restoration and conservation, living memorials and more.

"Families are ready to learn more about their options, and who better than us to give them that information?" Flowers said.

Education doesn't – and shouldn't – have to stop at the website.

Consider creating a piece of literature that explains your green burial ground's mission, the services you offer, pricing, products and packages that are available and why what you're offering can fulfill their needs.

This literature can be downloadable on your website, distributed at your cemetery, given to funeral homes to hand out to families interested in green services and distributed at events.

Esmeralda Kent, who founded green funeral products company Kinkaraco in 2005, said that becoming part of the community is important for green cemeteries. That being a part of the community is twofold – developing relationships with funeral directors and developing relationships with families.

"Relationship-building is so important," Kent said. "You need to be out there to talk about what you're doing and why it's important."

Funeral directors, she said, need to know what services you can provide, products that you offer and if you're able to create burial packages. The more they know about you, the better an advocate they can be to the families they serve.

Building relationships with families – your potential customers – can happen in a variety of ways. Consider becoming a place where families come for a variety of reasons beyond burials.

Consider hosting a sustainability fair, bringing in eco-friendly companies, speakers and products. Passages International has been helping funeral professionals cater to families interested in green burial and cremation and has a vast selection of products to help meet those needs. Bring in speakers, perhaps a family willing to share their green burial experience.

You can also reach out to community groups and offer to make a presentation on green burials and sustainability. This provides an opportunity for you to become the green funeral and burial expert.

Finally, if you don't already, invite the community in for recreational activities. Perhaps you can become the destination for walkers or joggers. Perhaps you can host a yoga class or some other activity.

Marketing is an evolving process, but the bottom line is this: People need to know who you are before they can use your services. •



Fair Trade and the Funeral Profession

By Patti Martin Bartsche

It wasn't that long ago that many in the funeral profession thought cremation was just a niche market.

In the 1970s, the cremation rate was just 5%. By 2001, it had rose to 27.1%. Today, the cremation rate sits at 56.1% (and growing), according to the 2021 Cremation Association of North America's 2021 Annual Statistics Report.

Will the same hold true for green products and services in the coming years?

It is quite possible.

A first-of-its-kind consumer survey conducted by Kates-Boylston Publications in 2008, found that just 7% of respondents had ever attended a green burial and 43% said they had considered a green burial/funeral.

Fast forward 13 years.

Kates-Boylston's 2021 Green Funerals and Burials Survey found that 51% of respondents had attended a green funeral and about 85% of respondents said if they were offered the choice of a green burial, it would be something they would consider. In addition, 91% said being environmentally friendly when it comes to funerals is important.

While southwest Wisconsin may be at top-of-mind when talking about green burial, Mitchell McNett, owner of Casey-McNett Funeral Home & Cremation Services in Cuba, Wisconsin, says green services are growing in popularity in the area.

Several years ago, members of the Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa approached the funeral home asking if they did green burials.

"The answer was 'absolutely,'" said McNett, who's been a licensed funeral director since 2015. "Since then, we've held a number of green burials for the nuns; in fact, we've done more green burials than traditional burials for the sisters."

Casey-McNett typically has a Passages bamboo casket on display, and it's become a talking point for families coming into the funeral home. "It sparks a conversation," McNett said. "People want to know what green is ... what's the point, what's the purpose. They have a real curiosity."

The Greening of Funeral Service

While not every family will choose a green burial, McNett says it's important to offer choices – and education.

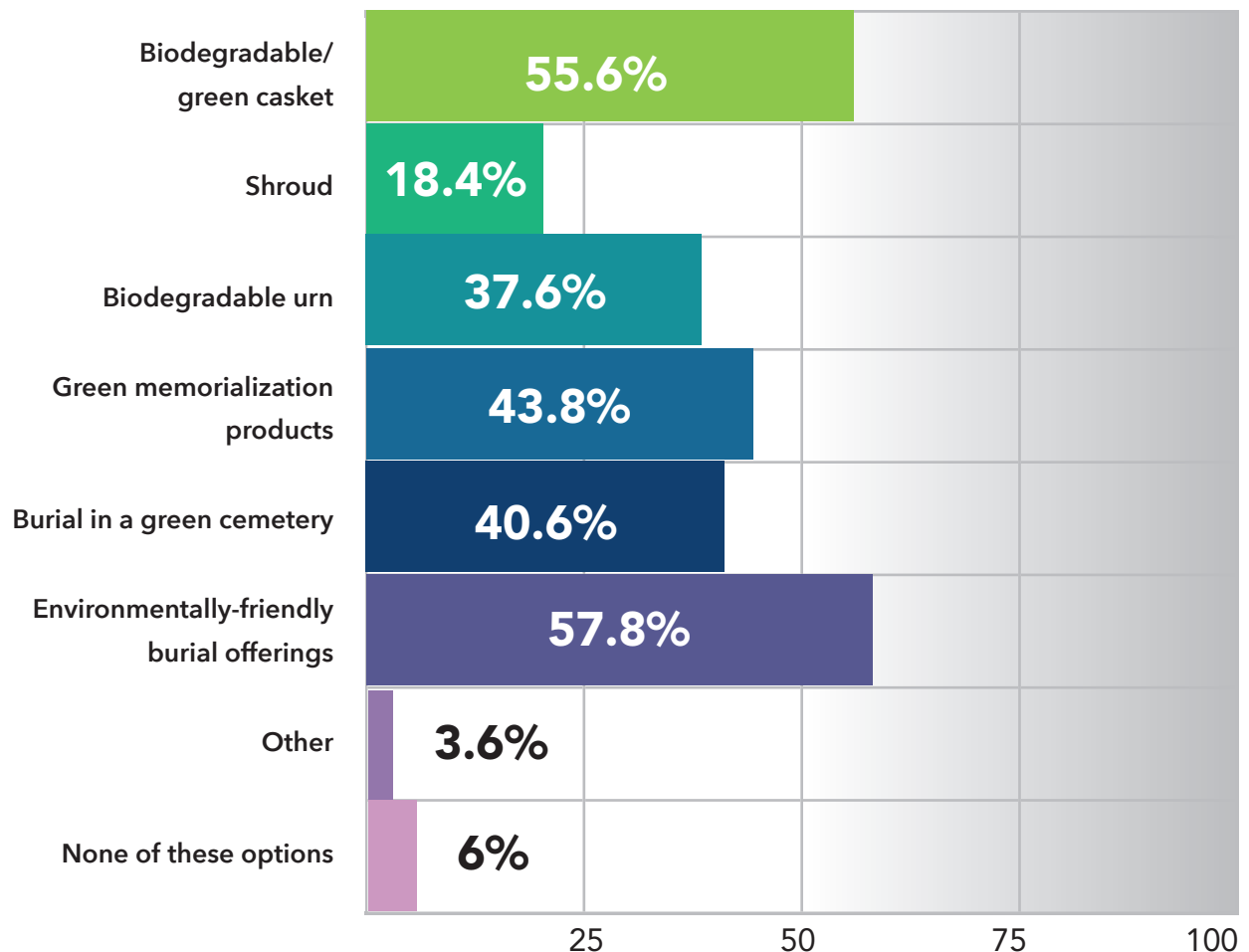
“There are families that don't want the 'traditional' funeral service,” McNett said. “The key is listening to families, finding out what they're interested in and offering choices.”

And as more families are living a greener life, it's safe to say that they are going to want greener choices in death.

“I think the more progressive funeral directors are offering green choices to the families they serve,” he said. “Families come to us for our expertise and services, so it's important to offer families what they want ... whatever that may be.”

The time is right, McNett and other forward-thinking funeral professionals believe, for funeral professionals to embrace what consumers want when it comes to greener funeral practices and burials.

If you were to choose green burial for yourself or a loved one, which of the following would you be interested in learning more about?



Some will move slowly, adopting greener practices in their operational structures, including switching to low-flow toilets, updating lighting systems, installing solar panels and purchasing electric vehicles. Others will take the next step by offering a full complement of sustainably produced and biodegradable urns, caskets and memorial products, as well as creating green or natural burials grounds within their cemeteries.

The most forward-thinking funeral professionals, though, will also turn to fair-trade products.

In the simplest terms, fair trade is trading between companies in developed countries and producers in developing countries in which fair prices are paid to the producers.

But is this something the funeral profession should concern itself with? While many might argue no (it's just a niche market), research says otherwise.

The 2015 Cone Communications Millennial CSR Study found that millennials (your future customers) are universally more engaged in corporate social responsibility.

The study also revealed more than nine-in-10 millennials would switch brands to one associated with a cause (91%), 87% would purchase a product with a social or environmental benefit and 82% would tell friends and family about corporate responsibility efforts.

And there's more.

A 2020 global survey conducted by IBM Institute for Business Value found that sustainability has reached a tipping point. As

consumers increasingly embrace social causes, they seek products and brands that align with their values.

Nearly six in 10 consumers surveyed are willing to change their shopping habits to reduce environmental impact, and nearly eight in 10 respondents indicate sustainability is important for them. For those who say it is very/extremely important, over 70% would pay a premium of 35%, on average, for brands that are sustainable and environmentally responsible.

Just as importantly, a recently released survey from Fairtrade America – an independent, third-party certification that partners with farmers and workers in developing countries to negotiate better prices, decent working conditions, and a fairer deal overall – points to an increased trust and favorable perception of fair-trade certified brands and products, as well as increased recognition of the fair-mark.

Fair Trade USA, in a survey released in August, found that one in three consumers feel fair trade is essential to their purchase, and retailers that use the Fair Trade Certified seal on their products see sales lift by 3.3% on average. And with deeper storytelling around the meaning of fair trade, sales can increase up to 134%. Increasingly, businesses, including some funeral firms, are turning to fair trade as a holistic partner for social compliance and responsibility.

Statistics from Fairtrade International show there are more than 1,800 producer organizations representing 1.8 million farmers and workers world-wide, growing and selling more than 35,000 products in 145 countries.

While many funeral professionals are familiar with fair-trade bananas, cocoa, coffee, tea and flowers, there are also fair-trade funeral service products available, including urns, cremation containers and caskets, too.

Unfortunately, many funeral directors (and cemeterians) do not think about fair trade when purchasing products.

“Funeral directors are busy and are typically not thinking about the environmental and social impact of the products they buy,” said Darren Crouch, founder and CEO of Passages International. “This will be a problem moving forward as consumers increasingly value knowing where, how and by whom a product is made.”

Crouch, who founded Passages in 1999, is proud that all of Passages caskets, carriers, shrouds and several urns are certified fair trade. “This is definitely not the norm in the industry and there are not many alternatives out there,” he said. “Passages continues to grow its selection of fair-trade products and takes a fair-trade approach to all our production and sourcing of existing non-fair-trade products.”

While there are many fair-trade certifications with different levels of credibility, the fair-trade movement generally agrees on a few key principles, according to the Fair World Project:

- Fair payment. A fair price covers the cost of production, pays workers fairly and still leaves enough profit to reinvest.
- Traceability and transparency. Open communication and fair contracts are the building blocks of fair trade.

- Capacity building. Support for local, community-led development.

- No forced or child labor. Labor exploitation is forbidden. Standards go beyond prohibition to address the root causes of forced and child labor.

- Respect for the environment. Additional premiums are paid for organic farming, recognizing the additional work required and valuing environmental stewardship.

- Ensuring good working conditions. Organizations are committed to following worker protection laws, reasonable work hours and healthy conditions for all.

- Democratic and transparent organizations. Democracy is central to fair trade, empowering small-scale producers and workers with a voice and a vote.

- Building power and protecting the most vulnerable. Organizations are committed to nondiscrimination. They actively support gender equity, equal pay and access to workers.

- Long-term direct relationships. The fewer steps between small-scale farmers and artisans and the end user, the more money can return to the producer.

While many families have a sense of what fair trade is, they might not fully understand all of the principles of fair trade, Crouch said. This provides an opportunity to educate families, he added.

Something as simple as putting the recognizable fair trade symbol on your catalog of products or website offers an easy education opportunity while also showing you

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"Having a bamboo casket on display is a conversation starter ... it allows us an opportunity to talk about green burials and answer any questions." – Mitchell McNett, owner, Casey-McNett Funeral Home & Cremation Services, Cuba, Wisconsin (Photo courtesy of Passages International)

care and provide valuable options to eco-conscious families.

But before you start educating your families though, it is important for you to learn and be able to speak intelligently about fair trade.

"This requires training and partnership with a company like Passages that can provide both the education and products to align with the values of those seeking more eco-friendly and socially responsible alternatives," Crouch said.

In addition, include fair trade information on funeral home websites, let the media know that you offer fair trade options and include information on fair trade in your merchandising solutions.

The goal is for families to view you as the information leader when it comes to green funeral services and products and fair trade.

As the 2021 Green Funerals and Burials Survey found, more than three out of four

respondents (85%) said that if they were planning a green funeral they would turn to a funeral home.

While this provides an opportunity for funeral homes to make new connections with families, it's only an opportunity if families know what the funeral home offers.

"It is so important to market the fact that a funeral home offers fair-trade options and green funerals," Crouch said. "Families often don't think about death until the inevitable happens and then they are not thinking straight as they are coping with grief.

"The beauty of green and fair trade products (from a business perspective) is that they tend to appeal to families currently underserved in the funeral industry," Crouch added. "These families see little value in traditional or cremation options and therefore will ultimately choose the simplest and cheapest products/services. Given alternatives that align with their values, families will often spend far above a funeral director's expectations." •



Looking Forward in the Funeral Industry

By Kilian Rempen, marketing manager, Passages International

Don't Ignore the Data.

There's a good reason that people commonly say we are living in "the information age." The phones in our pockets are much more powerful than the computers that landed astronauts on the moon. The internet gives us instant access to more information than the Great Library of Alexandria, and every day we create and store an estimated 1.1 trillion megabytes of new data around the world. The numbers are truly staggering. To put it in perspective: if we assume an average computer has 500 gigabytes of available storage, every day we are storing enough new data to fill 2.2 million computers.

Mark Cuban recently said "Data is the new gold. It's the new oil. It's the new plastics." Never before in history have we had so much data available to guide us and let us make educated decisions. The key, though, is using the data. The funeral industry, in particular, has been able to get by doing what's worked for the last few decades for a surprisingly long time, while other industries have undergone massive shifts.

The good news is that it's never too late to look at data and see how we can better serve our clients. Let's take a look at different data points released by Kates-Boylston Publications, the National Funeral Directors Association and the Cremation Association of North America that give a good idea of where our customers are today, the opportunities presented by cremation overtaking burial as the most popular funeral option, and how to create whole funeral experiences for families. Finally, we'll look at the broader topic of "doing good" in the funeral industry and how our industry can be a positive force, not only for the direct families we are working with but for all stakeholders involved.

Let's Look at the Numbers

The 2020 NFDA Consumer Awareness and Preferences Survey found that 61.7% of respondents would be interested in exploring green funeral options for a variety of reasons. Only 13.6% of respondents would not be interested in greener funeral options.

The most recent data released by Kates-Boylston Publications reports that an astonishing 91% of people consider the environmental impact of a funeral to be important; 84% would consider a green funeral if it was offered to them; and 85% would still contact a funeral home in their area if they were planning a green funeral. Over 92% of people also said that personalization is at least somewhat important. This means that families don't want to use a cookie-cutter funeral template that has been repeated again and again; they want to do something that has personal meaning. Allowing families the option of green and fair trade products gives those who value greener products something that aligns with their values.

With 85% of respondents saying they would contact a funeral home to help plan a green funeral, we know that families still see funeral homes as the experts in all things funeral – including green options. It's more important than ever for funeral directors to be well versed in the green funeral options available, and able to provide eco-friendly products and services to their client families. If a funeral home chooses not to offer green options, they run the risk of a competitor filling the demand.

Creating Experiences

We've established that families today value green options, value personalization, and trust funeral directors to present these options to them. Next, let's look at how we can create funerals for today's families that match their values through amazing experiences.

There's a common saying that "money should be spent on experiences, not things,"

and this is something that really resonates with people. Think about how many people consider travel to be one of their main interests. When you spend a few thousand dollars (or more) on a vacation, what do you get out of it? Studies show that vacations are not usually restful; they're actually a lot of work. After a vacation, you return with a tan, maybe some souvenirs, but nothing tangible that you'd spend thousands of dollars on. Still, it's generally accepted that the experience and memories gained from a trip itself are well worth the cost.

This same idea has permeated into many aspects of our lives and is well known in advertising. People don't spend money on something just because of the tangible aspects and facts; we spend money on things because of how they will make us feel.

For those that want something new but still want a burial, a green burial is the obvious answer. Green burials tend to have higher levels of participation from those attending the funeral, with family and friends often helping carry the casket, dig the grave and close the grave. The whole experience of a green funeral is reported to be a powerful tool to push people through the grieving and healing process. There is generally a sense of "oneness" with nature, feelings of returning to nature, and completion of the natural "circle of life."

On the other end of the spectrum, we have cremation, and the funeral industry is only now starting to tap into the experiences that become possible with cremation. Cremation, like embalming, should be considered the preparation of the body before what comes next. It's the first step in a multi-step process of building a memorial that

truly honors the deceased and carries their loved ones into the next stage of a very hard goodbye.

In the same way that you'd never let a family leave with an embalmed body to let them "figure it out" on their own, we need to know what the family intends to do after cremation. Cremation doesn't mean there can't be a memorial service, it only means that the final disposition won't be a traditional burial. A family could choose cremation and have a burial of their own, anywhere they like, using an earth biodegradable urn. If they intend to scatter, how can we elevate that experience? An avid hunter may wish to be a tree in their favorite forest. A scuba diver could be scattered at sea, or a stargazer could be sent off into space. The basic plastic or cardboard temporary container being handed to a family is probably not the end of the funeral, but that box, unfortunately, could be the lasting reminder of the service provided by the funeral home: cremation, and only cremation. But the real value to the family is what comes next: the memorial and the goodbye.

Another lingering idea is that cremation is considered "the cheap option" and thus cremation families only want the basic container and temporary urn. The focus groups conducted by CANA and Homesteaders Life Company show that lower price certainly is a benefit but is not the main attraction for most families. Unless your business' main sales proposition is being the cheapest cremation in town, families are coming to you because they know you offer more than a low price.

People value the flexibility that comes with cremation. If a family defaults to the basic cardboard or plastic box, it's not necessarily because that's the option they want, it only means that they didn't see enough value in the other options presented.

We've found that the true value in cremation comes from what comes after choosing the cremation itself, and this is where funeral professionals need to be the experts. Being able to suggest ideas to your client families for a unique memorial service, ways of personalizing the products to make the experience more meaningful, and creative memorialization options, like jewelry, show that you want to provide the best choices for them and their loved ones. Understanding that something like a cardboard cremation container can be outright jarring to a family member, and offering something like a fair trade bamboo container, can help ease the process and bring comfort to the family.

We've had families select a cremation, purchase dozens of mini-sized water biodegradable urns to split the cremated remains and take the friends and family of the deceased on a whale watching tour to scatter the remains at sea. We had one family purchase a Turtle Urn, and during their ceremony at sea, they were visited by real sea turtles, providing them a memorial experience they'll never forget.

Amazing memorials like these are impossible through a traditional burial, where the whole process is much more clear-cut and standardized. It doesn't have to be as fantastic as these two stories. Things like a beautiful sunset, a short hike to the scattering location, and the memory of being with

the deceased in that location, all help create a more impactful, personal, and healing experience for the family.

Doing Good in the Funeral Industry

The legendary English author Douglas Adams said it best: "To give real service, you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity." It's time for the funeral industry to embrace ethical and eco-conscious business practices for all stakeholders involved.

Eco-friendly practices are especially important in the funeral industry, which has, historically, been eco-unfriendly. Traditional burial practices, in particular, prove incredibly harmful to the environment. Traditional burials are resource-intensive, as cemeteries often consume vast tracts of land, are maintained with heavy machinery and industrial fertilizers, and are full of rare hardwood and metal caskets, all encased forever in concrete. For cremation, there are filtration systems available, but they are seldom used in the United States. These systems could drastically reduce the heavy carbon footprint of cremation.

Additional detriment to the earth comes from the finishes, adhesives, fabric linings, and hardware that are utilized in traditional wood caskets. Products made without considering sustainability are often unappealing and impractical to the modern customer, who has these values in mind. Leaving a lighter footprint is something that all companies today should value and strive to achieve.

Dedication to ethical practices, however, extends beyond just environmental concerns. Unethical manufacturing is prevalent

in many industries, including the funeral industry. Child labor, unpaid labor, and poor working conditions are unacceptable business practices, yet practices that still occur. They are particularly prevalent outside of the U.S., where governments are more likely to turn a blind eye to unlawful, and more importantly, unethical manufacturing practices. Partnering with a supplier of certified fair-trade products helps to ensure that workers are being fairly treated and fairly compensated. A fair-trade certification ensures a level of transparency, and products fit an array of rigorous social, environmental, and economic standards.

The most successful companies produce or sell products that provide true value to customers. Funeral homes must realize that products are no longer the focal point of the funeral. Customers are more interested in an experience, as mentioned before. Products simply provide and facilitate the creation of a meaningful experience that will allow mourners to properly honor a deceased family member or friend. Families seek products that align with these wants and will allow them to actively participate in the celebratory event, rather than just being a spectator. This is one of the reasons that scattering has become so popular.

The funeral industry has been slowly adapting to these new environmental, social and circumstantial expectations of customers. To appeal to the modern consumer, companies in the industry need to align with the values and expectations of families and not expect them to adapt to often "tired" or outdated products and services.

Data-driven businesses will evolve to better meet the demands and needs of families and will be seen as industry leaders, ensuring future growth and profitability. They will stand ready to not only prosper economically, but they will have raised the bar in the industry by benefiting not only shareholders but all stakeholders as well. •