

Full-service pet funeral home opens its doors in Edmonton

By Jamie Hall, Edmonton Journal November 14, 2012



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Owner Ardeth Strohschein in the pet caskets and urns section of her new Part of the Family Pet Memorial Centre in Edmonton on Wednesday, Nov. 14, 2012.

Photograph by: John Lucas , Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - Before it officially opened Thursday, the Family Pet Memorial Centre had already overseen the cremation of three cats, two dogs and a horse.

Cremation is one of many things Edmonton's first full-service pet funeral home at 11904 113th Ave. has to offer grieving pet owners. It uses two crematoria just outside the city exclusively for animals.

Caskets in varying sizes are available for sale or rent at the 3,100-square-foot facility. A visitation room allows family members to spend private time with their deceased pet. A pet celebrant will preside over a memorial service in the chapel. A reception hall gives mourners a

place to chat and have coffee and sandwiches afterwards. A resource centre carries an extensive selection of wares: pet urns, commemorative pet cremation jewelry, sympathy cards and books on coping with the loss of a pet.

The only thing missing is an actual pet cemetery, something owner Ardeth Strohschein hopes to rectify.

We don't have burial space yet, she says, but we're hoping to get a pet cemetery operating by next spring. □

Strohschein agrees this is a far cry from glued-together Popsicle sticks used as backyard grave markers, a version of the pet cemetery with which most people are familiar. But, she says, it's also a sign of the times.

A licensed funeral director, Strohschein also owns a funeral home for humans. She says the need for a pet funeral home for Edmonton and northern Alberta has been apparent to her and her colleagues in the industry for years.

We were always getting calls and queries from people who wanted to be able to have a memorial service for their pets, she says. They consider them part of the family. □

And, says Barry Seltzer, given that the pet industry in North America is worth upwards of \$65 billion a year, it shouldn't come as any surprise.

There are a lot of people who spend an inordinate amount of money just trying to save their pets lives, says Seltzer, a Toronto lawyer who specializes in wills and estate planning. A strong advocate of making provisions for pets in wills, he also co-authored the book *Fat Cats and Lucky Dogs: How to Leave (Part of) Your Estate To Your Pets*.

Seltzer says blood banks for pets wouldn't exist if there wasn't a market, nor would pet chiropractic care, cancer treatments or acupuncture.

Or funeral homes.

Bottom line, he says, is that people love their pets in life and want to be able to honour them in death, as they would any other family member.

If it's affordable for you, you're entitled to do whatever you want, he says.

Strohschein says a full funeral costs \$350, which also includes the reception. Private cremation, for people who want their pet's ashes returned to them, costs on average \$150, depending on size. Communal cremation is about half that.

Caskets cost about \$250 to purchase, depending on the size. Rentals " for people who want to have their pet in the casket during the service " cost about \$125.

When a pet dies, our love for them doesn't end, says Strohschein. They not only give us unconditional love; for some people, they get the kind of companionship they can't get from humans.

This is just about recognizing that relationship.

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