

BUSINESS

Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral Home and Crematory treats your pet as their own

By NATALIE KENNEDY
Record-Argus News Editor

HERMITAGE — Planning a funeral for a family member is a fact of life: Everyone dies. But did you ever consider the fact that pets are as much as part of today's family as Grandma or Aunt Ginny?

Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral Home and Crematory, 2916 E. State St., Hermitage, has considered that. In fact, the company's motto is "Where we treat your pets as family."

The business opened Dec. 1, 2006, next to the Avenue of 444 Flags, and is operated by Roberta Knauf. According to Knauf, the idea actually came from Tom Flynn, owner of Hillcrest Memorial Park, Hermitage. Knauf said Flynn wanted to open a pet cemetery, and as he was getting a developer, was completing zoning regulations and hiring an architect, "we realized there was a tremendous call, not only for a pet cemetery," but for the pet funeral home as well.

Flynn met with Coleen Ellis, owner of Pet Angel Memorial Center of Carmel, Ind., the first stand-alone pet funeral home in the United States. After meeting with her, Flynn came back and told Knauf "I think this is something we need to add to our cemetery."

So in the summer of 2006, Flynn called Knauf and announced that this idea of a pet funeral home and cemetery was something he wanted to do. As a long-time friend and staunch animal-lover, Knauf supported his decision. As she read a copy of a story written about Ellis and her establishment, Knauf said to herself: "This is phenomenal." Having worked in the pet care industry for 25 years, Knauf understood why Ellis first opened her business, and understood the role that closure in the death of a pet would bring to the pet's family.

Just after having lunch across the street from Hillcrest Memorial Park one day, Flynn and Knauf were standing there, looking out across East State Street and admiring the site of the future pet funeral home. An elderly gentleman walked up to the pair and began to tell Knauf the story of his little dog who had died, and as the man talked, tears ran down his face.

After the gentleman left, Knauf looked at Flynn and said "I want to do it."

And while some may scoff at the idea of a pet funeral home, or even of a pet funeral, Knauf said things must be put in perspective. "People that do have pets understand. Parents of children who have pets understand that if you don't get things right, you'll regret it."

"The cards I get are just phenomenal. People do care," she said. "All they want is for someone to say 'I understand what that pet meant to you, and what you're feeling is not foolish' ... We don't know



Jim Rust/R-A

HERMITAGE — Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Cemetery and Crematory proprietor Roberta Knauf gives a command to her black Labrador retriever Tara as the pair display one of the viewing rooms at the funeral home. In addition to being one of the first, if not the first, perpetual care pet cemeteries in the country, Knauf runs a full-service pet crematory.

what that pet meant to some of those people ... Some people, all they had was that pet, and so I take my job very seriously."

When a pet passes away or is about to be taken to the veterinarian to be put down, Knauf is called by the family. If the pet is on the way to the vet's, Knauf or another member of her staff will meet the family at the vet's office and offer comfort and condolences throughout the process. Someone from the funeral home will wait through the euthanization process with the family, then take the pet to the funeral home.

If the pet is already deceased, the animal will be picked up at the owner's home.

After the pet is returned to the funeral home, Knauf grooms the pet and readies it for viewing. The viewing is a process almost exactly the same as would occur for a human family member: The pet is placed in a casket in one of the viewing rooms, and the family is given the opportunity to spend time with the pet and say good-bye.

"And sometimes all the family needs is time," she said. "Sometimes (the death) all happens so fast, (the family) just needs to deal with it."

Knauf added that there are numerous options available to families as well. In the past when a pet was euthanized at the veterinarian's office, a family had to decide right then and there what would be

done, whether that was burial or cremation. Now, Knauf can take the animal back to the funeral home and the family can take a few days to decide what course will be taken. "I think that's one of the most comforting things, that now a family has time to deal with the options."

If cremation is chosen, the family may even opt to watch the process. Knauf said family members are sometimes more comforted by the fact that they know for sure it is their pet's remains in the urn. And, Knauf said, each cremation is done separately. That means when the pet is to be cremated, the actions are private and individual to each animal. "We absolutely guarantee that we will not co-mingle. If you want, you can wait (while the cremation process is completed). It can take up to three hours," Knauf said. And the cremation furnace used by Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral

"We want to help people who have experienced a pet loss. We want to help people through their grief process. That's why we're here."

— Roberta Knauf, Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral Home and Crematory

Home and Crematory is used strictly for cremation of pets.

The cremations are done with state of the art equipment, Knauf said, which is monitored by the Environmental Protection Agency, and is fully computerized. Knauf worked with the manufacturer of the cremation furnace to become certified in operating the equipment, which is used specifically for pets. The only pets Hillcrest-Flynn cannot do are horses, because of their size, Knauf said.

In addition to cremation, pet owners may choose the option of burial. If burial is chosen, the owner has a choice of caskets and may purchase a plot in the pet cemetery, which is a perpetual care facility. Knauf said Flynn's pet cemetery is the only perpetual care facility in the country "that we know of" and because it is adjacent to a human cemetery, it is possible for owners to be buried alongside a loved pet.

After the burial, several options still exist for an owner to memorialize a deceased pet. Those options are part of the pet funeral package, and range from a painting of the family with the pet to memorial pillows, to photo frames to a blanket with the pet's photo interweaved into the material. For a complete pet funeral, Knauf said the cost

can run up to almost \$1,000 for the most elaborate pet funeral."

Hillcrest-Flynn also has items and gifts for pet owners who haven't experienced a loss. If you have a friend who experienced the loss of a pet, "we have sympathy items we can send them," Knauf said.

"We want to help people who have experienced a pet loss," she said. "We want to help people through their grief process. That's why we're here."



Hillcrest-Flynn Pet Funeral Home and Crematory, 2619 E. State St., Hermitage, can be reached by phone at (724) 347-5100; or by e-mail at doggyru@gmail.com.

Werner asks for approval of lead bidder in bankruptcy auction

NEW YORK (Dow Jones/AP) — Werner Holding Co. said a U.S. bankruptcy judge approved the company's request to select Black Diamond Capital Management and Brencourt Advisors LLC as the lead bidder to buy the company's assets for about \$265 million.

The sale, which includes the forgiveness of debt and assumption of liabilities, will allow the company's operations to emerge from bankruptcy protection in May, said Werner, a Greenville, Pa.-based ladder maker.

The U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware also ruled that other bidders could make an offer by April 20 provided the offer is at least \$1 million more than Black Diamond and Brencourt's.

A hearing to approve the winning bidder is set for April 25.

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