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► Gary Freytag, CCFE, is president and CEO of the Spring Grove Family, including Spring Grove Cemetery, Gwen Mooney Funeral Homes and Oak Hill Cemetery. He joined Spring Grove in 2003 and is responsible for all aspects of the organization, which handles more than 1,600 cemetery and 950 funeral services annually.

► Freytag is ICCFA treasurer, former secretary and a former member of the ICCFA Board of Directors. He is dean of the ICCFAU College of Administration and Management.

► He earned a bachelor's degree in economics from Dartmouth College in 1984 and a master's degree in business administration from Harvard University. He has a wide variety of business experience, including serving as vice president and treasurer for Eagle Picher, a manufacturing organization with 25 divisions and nearly \$1 billion in revenue worldwide.

► Freytag is a member of the Cemetery Council, the Historic Cemetery Alliance and the Death Care Management Council.

► Spring Grove Cemetery was chartered in 1845 and is one of the largest nonprofit cemeteries in the United States. Approximately 450 of its 750 acres are developed.

www.springgrove.org

MORE FROM GARY FREYTAG



► ICCFA University 2016 will be held July 22-27 at the Fogelman Conference Center, University of

Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee. Freytag is a dean and professor. Curricula and registration information will be available in the spring at www.iccfa.com/events.

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Spring Grove Cemetery & Arboretum does not lack for cremation options. It offers just about everything, and thousands of cremation spaces are still available. But it recently opened a major new cremation development in order to expand the options for cremation families.



Spring Grove's Fountain of Remembrance development includes 1,250 double niches in the niche banks from Carrier Mausoleums Construction, plus 400 individual interment spaces in the flower beds.

Spring Grove's new development puts cremation front and center

Spring Grove Cemetery and Arboretum in Cincinnati, Ohio, offers families many cremation options, and those gardens are not running out of space. Nevertheless, the cemetery recently unveiled a new \$1.3 million cremation garden in a prime location close to the historic cemetery's entrance.

Spring Grove already had thousands of cremation spaces available before this new development opened. The Fountain of Remembrance's walls provide 1,250 double niches, and there are 400 individual interment spaces available in the flower beds.

"If you asked me how many cremation spaces Spring Grove has, I would say thousands," Spring Grove President and CEO Gary Freytag, CCFE, said. "We offer ground interment and columbarium niches—glass-front niches, a waterfall complex. We offer everything but scattering, though we have a walking trail with biodegradable

urns—our version of scattering.

"But what we're trying to do is give the cremation customer more variety. So the development we've done recently is in product offerings we didn't offer previously: a cremation nature trail, glass-front niches and this development."

"Interestingly, I brought my parents, who are the classic cremation customers, to the cemetery. I took them to the Fountain of Remembrance and my father loved it, thought it was fantastic. My mother hated it, didn't like the feel. I took them to the nature trail and my mother loved that, while dad said, 'Absolutely no way.'

"They're leaving the decision to me, of course. So I'm probably going to put half of their remains in each section."

The new Fountain of Remembrance cremation garden places cremation front and center at Spring Grove. It provides a spacious yet intimate setting where families can gather



Above, Deb Fox, preplanning advisor, and Skip Phelps, director of advance planning, demonstrate the two options for placement of urns in the Fountain of Remembrance: in the ground in one of the planters, or in a curved granite niche wall.



Left, the rendering by Carrier Mausoleums Construction of landscape architect Jack C. Goodnoe's design shows how their curved niche banks form intimate smaller spaces within the large garden.

Below, a group of Spring Grove Family employees pose at the Fountain of Remembrance development after its dedication.



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The new cremation development (**above**) includes design details that tie it in with the nearby entrance gates to the historic cemetery, as well as the 1850s Norman Chapel (**both below**). The cutouts in the vertical pillars in the cremation garden mirror the carvings and window shapes in the chapel and on the the front gate.



for inurnments and return to for quiet contemplation in beautiful surroundings. The architecture is clean and modern but includes design details that recall the 19th-century architecture of the nearby cemetery entrance and the Norman Chapel.

The cremation rate in the area is about 50 percent, Freytag said, and that holds true for the organization's funeral home. At the cemetery, the rate is 30 percent.

Spring Grove has been working for several years to increase the memorialization rate for families who choose cremation, making sure every family who uses the funeral home is presented with memorialization options, and that effort is going well, Freytag said.

"We've increased the absolute number of cremation placements at Spring Grove, and we've also increased the percentage of our cases that are cremation-related," Freytag said. The new garden is also designed to contribute to that effort.

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Above, the fountain as it was before the new development, below. The planters accept inurnments, with memorialization placed on the planters' granite sides.



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The Fountain of Remembrance offers granite niches in an area designed to be both grand and intimate.

"It's what they call in Canada a hardscape, as opposed to softscape, which means it's primarily granite and water, though there are some flower planters. The primary offering is granite niches, but we also do ground inurnments inside the flowerbeds." The memorialization for those flowerbed inurnments will be on the sides of the planters.

Inurnments and memorialization are limited to the planters and niche banks;

neither the fountain nor the paving blocks offer memorialization options. There are two small grass areas outside the paved circle where ground inurnments will probably be offered in the future.

"That was intentional," Freytag said of the limited options. "The reason we didn't put more product in there was to maintain architectural integrity. This is located in a historic section of Spring Grove; on one side there is architecture from the 1800s. And it literally butts up against Spring Grove Avenue, so it's right down in front at the cemetery, near the entrance."

The granite and stone garden looks like it could be a war memorial or other public

project, not necessarily a cemetery garden. Again, that was intentional, Freytag said.

Spring Grove is not running out of space, and that gave them a lot of flexibility in the design. "We didn't have to get maximum density out of this development. We got decent density, but not maximum density."

They decided they wanted to use the existing fountain, which had been there for years, and to make the development fit the scale of the fountain.

"I've seen a lot of cremation developments in my travels around North America," Freytag said. I've been to the French properties in Albuquerque, to Mount Pleasant in Toronto, to the Lohman properties in Florida, to a number of historic cemeteries.

"There are some themes that seem to run through the cremation developments that work." One of those themes is breaking up larger gardens into smaller spaces—"15 by 12 feet, 12 by 10 feet, 20 by 15 feet—providing people with a sense of intimacy."

The designers needed to balance the scope and scale of the project as a whole with the inclusion of areas where families could have a sense of privacy, Freytag said.

That is why the niche banks are curved, creating clustered areas within the larger space. Overall, there is enough open space to allow for inurnment services with up to 60 or 70 people, Freytag estimated.

Families who prefer an indoor service can use the Norman Chapel, about 200 yards away from the Fountain of Remembrance.

The design was the result of collaboration between landscape architect Jack C. Goodnoe and representatives of Spring Grove. The team from Carrier Mausoleums Construction then brought the design to life, Freytag said, praising Carrier as an innovative firm to work with.

Incorporating feng shui

"Another design element we tried to embrace was *feng shui*," Freytag said. "We don't have a large Asian population here, but we thought it was a good design principle." "I've had multiple conversations with former ICCFA President Ken Varner." (Varner is president and CEO of Cypress Lawn Cemetery Association, Colma, California, which *does* serve a large Asian population.)

The niche banks closest to Spring Grove Avenue are six or seven niches high, and

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therefore seven or eight feet high, while the ones to either side are five niches high, or about five-and-a-half feet high.

There are steps from the niche banks down to the fountain/planter level.

The taller niche banks serve the *feng shui* function of a mountain blocking the wind; the lower fountain serves the function of a water feature retaining energy.

The placement of the Fountain of Remembrance garden near the cemetery entrance and the funeral home means that it's easy to bring families to see it.

Within a month of opening the garden, Spring Grove had sold nearly \$150,000 worth of property in it, Freytag said. No preconstruction sales were made, and there has been no marketing campaign to announce its availability. During construction, "We put a small sign out that said 'coming soon,' and that's about it," Freytag said.

Asked if, now that it's open, Spring Grove would be launching any sort of advertising campaign for the new garden, Freytag replied, "I don't think we have to; this design is selling itself." □



The area as it looked before the new development, which is screened from Spring Grove Avenue by trees. The niche banks are also highest closest to the avenue, helping block traffic sounds. The road between the Fountain of Faith (now renamed), and the Garden of the Four Seasons leads to the Norman Chapel and the cemetery's main entrance in one direction and to Spring Grove's main funeral home in the other direction.