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**ICCFA Magazine
author spotlight**

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MORE FROM THIS AUTHOR

► Educational information, including copies of this article, can be found at www.f4sight.com

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Editor's note: The Cemetery Impossible column is written by the staff of The Foresight Companies. **If you have a question you want to be featured in this column, please send it to danisard@f4sight.com.** Dan Isard or a member of his staff will call you to get more information and a recommendation will be provided via this column, helping not only you but also others who are facing similar challenges.

MANAGEMENT/SALES

The price for a water feature might seem high, but consider the ways it can generate more revenue for your cemetery.

Cemetery Impossible

What do you do when the well runs dry?

Dear Cemetery Impossible,

My cemetery is almost 80 years old. We use a well for our groundwater source. The well is starting to dry up. My city has told me that if the well dries up, I will be required to use a low-lying area for a retaining pond. The alternative is to buy water from the city, which is very expensive.

The retaining pond idea scares me, because I have not developed that area yet and the local land architect estimates it would cost about \$250,000 for a quarter-acre lake site. What can I do?

Sincerely, High and Dry

Dear High and Dry,

Frankly, based upon today's interment market, you are lucky that you need to create a lake. I say this from the perspective of cost, features and revising your master plan.

The city water could cost \$20,000 a year in perpetuity. Alternatively, you can finance the cost of the lake and pay it off at \$20,000 a year for 15 years or so. From a dollars-out-of-pocket standpoint, the lake is a better solution than getting water from the city.

Since I solved your problem in fewer words than it took to describe it, let us now discuss the greater benefit of the lake.

You perceive the lake as a liability. You need a retention area to draw water from as a replacement for or a compliment to your well. However, I see it as a great source of potential income and benefit for you.

Water retention areas are features. Features raise the value of the interment area. You said this was a low-lying area, which leads me to infer it is often wet anyway. These areas are usually not good for burial because, depending upon the weather, you could be burying into a water-filled grave. No one likes that.

However, by creating a design around a lake, you can offer high-end above-ground options, rather than needing to dig for burial. Above-ground options around



water can be private estate mausoleums or communal mausoleums. These would be valued at a premium with the water feature.

Most designers look at a water feature and design it as a circle or oval. This is simple and easy to build. I would ask that you think about a different design. Think about a kidney shape, or a figure-eight.

You might need a quarter-acre pond, but if we can take that surface area and create more shoreline, that gives you more options for interment rights adjacent to or in sight of the water. Therefore, you have more points of value.

Think about features within the lake. Obviously, fountains provide a pretty sight line and aerate the water, helping the aquaculture within.

Incorporate some "lightscaping" in the area. This will bring more attention to the area at night, which gives people driving by a reminder of the quality of your property. Solar-fueled lights can provide illumination for about four hours each evening at no operating cost. You do not need to illuminate it much later than that.

I have seen many lake areas include a ramada or kiosk that encourages people to congregate. Add permanent seating and tables and you encourage people to come to your cemetery. A lake and the amenities you create can provide that invitation to your families—and to potential customers.

As you can see, water can offer positive options. However, it also brings a few burdens. Some cemeteries have brought in swans or waterfowl to inhabit the area. Obviously, animals need care and create waste.

When dealing with animals, there are management issues to be dealt with. Even if you do not stock the area with wildlife,

MANAGEMENT/ SALES

A lake can provide many cremation interment options. You can allow scattering in the lake. You can build cenotaphs (memorial trees or brick programs) to provide permanent memorials. The shoreline can also provide interment options.

migrating species will find their way to you.

Bees may also create an issue. However, if you find ways to house the bees, you can offer the honey to a local food pantry and convert this to a solid local community outreach program that will bring good publicity.

So, a lake can become a central point for humans, animals and insects.

I recommend that today's cemeteries revisit their master plans. This should be a priority. Your property is 80 years old. Except for a few crazies, burials were common in the days of President Roosevelt.

Well, the tide has obviously turned. Recent studies show cremations make up 48 percent of dispositions. I believe that number will go up to almost 80 percent within the next generation.

I also know that in cemeteries that offer multiple inurnment options, almost 50 percent of those choosing cremation entrust the cremated remains to the cemetery. I also know that almost 35 percent of all people retain their loved one's cremated remains for future decision-making.

It's obvious that the cemetery of tomorrow needs to refocus on cremation interment options rather than traditional burial.

A lake can provide many cremation interment options. You can allow scattering in the lake. You can build cenotaphs (memorial trees or brick programs) to provide permanent memorials. The shoreline can also provide interment options via man-made river rocks for inurnment.

I have seen several cemeteries create islands within their lakes for private and communal mausoleums. The exclusivity of this offering can generate substantial revenue for you. Memorial bricks can line the bridges connecting the island to the shore, providing more options for cremation families.

You know that if life gives you lemons, you should make lemonade. In this case, it would be very sweet lemonade indeed. 