

Entrepreneur

Death Becomes You

With Creative Funerals on the Rise, the Reaper's Not So Grim After All

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The funeral industry may not be in its prime, but personalized funerals will be alive and kicking in 2007. Baby boomers who demand that things be done “their way,” coupled with innovative entrepreneurs and a trend toward cremations, are shaking life into this lifeless industry. So bid farewell to the traditional church funeral and say hello to memorial services held on golf courses, ashes scattered while skydiving and remains launched into outer space by rockets.

According to Lisa Takeuchi Cullen, author of *Remember Me: A Lively Tour of the New American Way of Death*, “There will be a whole different array of services and merchandise to accommodate people who only want cremation, who don’t want to pay \$3,000 for the ornate traditional casket, who don’t need embalming, who don’t need that open-casket wake at the funeral home.”

Any important event needs an event planner, and funerals are no exception. In 2000, Mark Duffey, 50, was one of a team of co-founders who created Everest Funeral Package LLC, a funeral concierge service in Houston. For a relatively small fee, they compare prices, plan funerals and accommodate all their customers’ needs - 24 hours a day. Ask them to arrange for bagpipers to play on a mountaintop, and they won’t even bat an eye. They just rolled out their service in the U.S. late last year and are living it up with a million-dollar business.

But the possibilities don’t end there. LifeGem in Chicago can transform carbon remains into a diamond in just 24 to 36 weeks. Suddenly the expression “diamonds are forever” takes on a whole new meaning. Hollywood-quality memorial movies are also a budding business. “Smart entrepreneurs are going to come up with new options,” says Cullen. “For everyone who rolls his eyes, there’s someone out there who will think [the] idea is the perfect thing for their loved one.”

—S.W.

www.everestfuneral.com

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