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Green Hill responds to popularity of cremation

Cemetery adds area for cremated ashes

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BEDFORD — It's cheaper, greener and, for some, a more appealing option than spending eternity in a box underground.

Cremation is a growing trend as more people choose it over traditional burial.

According to the Indiana Cemetery Association, cremation is chosen in 51.7 percent of all deaths in the state.

To keep up with that trend, Green Hill Cemetery installed its first columbarium, to contain ashes, earlier this month. It was

placed just west of the office.

It contains 48 niches to hold cremains.

Gene Abel, Green Hill manager and former member of the Green Hill Cemetery Association, said it was past time for the cemetery to provide the option.

"We realized if we didn't do this, we were getting further behind the times," he said.

People choose cremation for a variety of reasons. Affordability is one, but for others, it's because as society becomes more mobile, they may not have family to tend to or visit the gravesite.

"Around here, and I'm not trying to knock people, that's the cheapest route," said Abel. "But in many parts of the country, the thinking is changing. After you

look at the cost of caskets, headstones and vaults, a traditional burial is costly."

Depending on where you live and the cost of services, cremation can cost a third of what a traditional burial costs.

Abel has been pushing for the cemetery to install a columbarium for several years. He had proposed a plan that called for a 100-niche columbarium, but the association didn't have the money to make the investment.

The association is in better financial shape these days.

Dan Bortner, president of the Green Hill Cemetery Association, said agreements with the county and city government to offset mowing expenses and a change



TIMES-MAIL / DERREK TIPTON

BEDFORD — Green Hill Cemetery is constructing a columbarium to hold cremains. Stan Ritchison helps place the columbarium.

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in how cemeteries are allowed to invest money in the Perpetual Care Fund as well as community donations have eased the financial strain on the historic cemetery.

The Lawrence County Council and Commissioners agreed to reimburse Green Hill Cemetery for

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mowing the old section of the cemetery that was actually owned by Lawrence County.

Additionally, the Green Hill Cemetery Association entered into an agreement in 2017 with the city of Bedford to mow the grass at Beech Grove Cemetery. Green Hill received a payment of \$63,000, which was equal to what the city had budgeted to maintain Beech Grove in 2018.

“This mutually beneficial contract gets the city of Bedford out of the cemetery mowing business and allows Green Hill

Cemetery Association to bring in extra revenue by mowing the city owned property,” said Bortner in an email to the Times-Mail. “By offering more acreage when the Green Hill Cemetery Association goes to bid the mowing contract, we can get a better bid on all the property collectively, thus allowing the city to take advantage of reducing their workload and allowing the Parks Department to focus on

other issues while Green Hill Cemetery Association brings in additional revenue to offset expenses.”

Bortner stressed none of those sources were used to buy the columbarium.

“The purchase of this new columbarium was made completely with funds raised from cemetery services, including plot sales, marker setting and things of this nature,” Bortner said. “None of the funding raised by donations or the agreements with the city or county was utilized in adding the columbarium, as those funds are earmarked for grounds maintenance only.”

Abel said walkways will be installed soon leading

to the columbarium. The niches will sell for about \$2,000 each.

A portion of the cost is used for long-term maintenance.

“I have no idea how they will sell, but people have told me, ‘If you get it going, I’ll buy one,’” Abel said. “The world is changing. With cremation, you’re not disturbing the environment or cluttering the earth. For people who feel that way or don’t want to be in a box in the ground, it’s the thing to do.”

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