

CANA Crematory Profile

Cremation Society of Illinois Discusses its Crematory Operation

Founded in 1983 by CANA board member Jerry Sullivan, Cremation Society of Illinois provides its customers an affordable alternative to the traditional funeral home model, explains Cremation Society of Illinois Operations Manager Don Fritz.

Q: How long has your firm been in business, and how did the company get its start?

Fritz: Cremation Society of Illinois was founded in 1983 by Jerry Sullivan in Park Forest, Illinois. The society was founded to provide consumers an affordable alternative to the traditional funeral home model.

Q: What's the average number of cremations performed at your company per year?

Fritz: Cremation Society of Illinois served over 2000 families in 2009.

Q: Are you using new or old equipment? If both, do you know the difference in fuel usage between the two? Is your old equipment used as a backup?

Fritz: Our newest cremation unit is seven years old. To ask if we are using old or new equipment is a relative term; even the oldest cremation equipment can operate efficiently if properly maintained. We are always striving to operate our existing equipment as efficiently and effectively as possible through operator training, weekly cleaning and maintenance and quarterly inspections.

Q: Does your cremation operation have any specialties or offer anything unique?

Fritz: We offer chapels for committal services as well as witnessing areas at both of our cremation facilities.

Q: About what percentage of your cremation customers do full-fledged memorial services and how are those handled?

Fritz: Unfortunately, not enough of the families we serve hold memorial services after a loved one has passed away. During the arrangement conference, we review all the options available to them from military honors at the national cemetery to a simple gathering at the family residence. At this time, we see about 25 percent of the families we serve holding some type of gathering or service. We have noticed that the trend has been to hold the service at a later time when it is more convenient for family and friends to gather. Also the services are becoming more personalized with custom printing, music and video as well as alternative locations and food and drinks.



Operations Manager Don Fritz, left, stands with Cremation Society of Illinois Owner and President Jerry Sullivan, pictured above.

Q: A marketing strategy is a crucial business practice. Please tell us about yours.

Fritz: Yes, we have a full-time marketing person on staff with several assistants. We are finding that the traditional avenues of marketing Cremation Society of Illinois need to be augmented with community outreach as well as our Internet presence.

Q: Do you do pet cremations?

Fritz: Yes, we do have a pet crematory and have been in the pet business for 12 years now.

Q: How long has your business been a CANA member; and what is your favorite benefit of your CANA membership?

Fritz: We have been CANA members for more than 24 years. My favorite benefit of our membership is the networking opportunities available to us at the various CANA functions throughout the year. I enjoy sharing ideas and stories with likeminded colleagues from across North America.

Q: How long have you personally been in the deathcare industry?

Fritz: I have been in the deathcare industry for 22 years.

Q: Where do you see the industry headed?

Fritz: I believe the deathcare industry will continue to be driven by the demands of the consumer; those not willing or able to conform will be on the outside looking in. The savvy consumer of today will use the Internet to make preneed and at-need arrangements, select merchandise from multiple resources and be willing to conduct business with a competitor on the other side of town or the other end of the country. And this consumer will be more likely to hold their memorial service in a banquet hall, restaurant, botanical garden or museum than in a traditional funeral home. 