

John A. Gentleman opens Bellevue location, builds upon community services

by Tiffany Gann

Going green and technology trends may not be the first things that come to mind when thinking of a funeral home, but for John A. Gentleman Mortuaries, the independently owned funeral service provider is not only forward thinking in both areas, but has also recently opened a third location in Bellevue to accommodate a demand for additional options in the area.

Opening the Sarpy County facility in June, the company has already seen a spike of growth in funeral pre-arrangements — an option for individuals to make arrangements so their families aren't burdened with the planning process.

President Thomas Belford, who purchased John A. Gentleman from his parents in 2003, has helped build upon services of the company, which has locations at 72nd and Western streets, 141st and Pacific streets and now 3402 Samson Way in Bellevue.

Of those services, perhaps the most trendy is the incorporation of smartphones.

"We do have a connection with a company that makes markers that can use QR codes; we've had that for about a year now," Belford said.

Through this service, a QR code is affixed to the grave marker, which can be scanned with a smartphone and will lead to a website that may offer a detailed history of a person's life.

John A. Gentleman has also put consideration in a company that utilizes the GPS feature on a smartphone to locate a grave within a cemetery by setting coordinates for each grave.

As part of the National Green Burial Council, John A. Gentleman also provides eco-friendly options to families.

"We're working with the city of Bellevue and the cemetery there and they're working on green cemetery options," Belford said. "We're very much in the forefront of that."

The company provides biodegradable caskets and urns or burials without the use



Facilities Manager Diane Vanderloo and President Thomas Belford ... Offering more options than ever including green and tech options.

of embalming fluids.

Within each of the funeral service provider's facilities, a variety of options for funeral and memorial services are increasing in popularity.

"It's a fully licensed funeral home, so we provide all the regular funeral and cremation services and memorial services," Belford said. "We've taken a little bit of a step forward beyond that and we're capable of doing a lot of catering here too."

The offering of onsite catering as an option to families is only one of several services provided beyond funeral arrangements.

John A. Gentleman also utilizes the facility to host a multitude of community events from continuing education programs for nurses, which was co-sponsored by the mortuary along with Nebraska Respite

and even a stuffed bear for the service of an avid hunter.

Beyond the funeral service, John A. Gentleman also focuses on bereavement services for those looking for additional help.

"We meet several times a week at the different locations and it's a free service," he said. "It includes different topics so if someone needs somebody to talk to, they can come back in a couple weeks for a different topic."

Facilities Manager Diane Vanderloo noted the importance of these services when the survived has nowhere else to turn.

"You're in a room with people that are feeling the same way, experiencing some of the same feelings," Vanderloo said. "After their husband has been gone for six months a lot of the family members don't feel comfortable talking about it anymore — they don't want to make them sad."

John A. Gentleman also pays tribute to individuals by planting trees at Lauritzen Gardens; an annual dedication will take place Oct. 16.

The funeral provider started in 1906 at 20th and Cuming streets. Belford's father later purchased the business in 1956. He joined his father in the business in 1980 and later purchased it in 2003. His community involvement includes the Omaha Community Playhouse and Hope Center for Kids. He is president-elect of the Selected Independent Funeral Homes and a member of Preferred Funeral Directors International.

Resource Center, to an Omaha Executives Association meeting.

"Every quarter we have a quarterly breakfast and we open it up to the public," he said. "We have talks about everything except death."

Meetings have touched on topics including the Omaha Storm Chasers and multiple generations in the workplace.

John A. Gentleman is so focused on community events, it even offered its facilities for weddings that had been displaced due to the flood.

While nobody took the funeral provider up on the offer, it has had its fair share of unique services.

Details for services have included anything from printing a red "N" on prayer cards to represent the Huskers, to motorcycles