



Funeral home recycles, donates to charity

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A funeral home in Victorville has joined a unique effort to turn artificial human remains into a blessing for others.

Desert View Funeral Home is the first funeral home to recycle metal prostheses such as rods and hip joints that remain after cremation and send the proceeds to the Unforgettables Foundation, a charity started in Redlands several years ago that helps families pay for the funerals of their children.

"We have metal parts that are left over after the cremation and they do not incinerate down," said Mitch Morales, funeral director. "We have to separate those out before we process the remains. In the past, they were put into a vault and interred in the cemetery."

That was until Tim Evans, executive director of the Unforgettables Foundation, officiated a service at the funeral home and asked about the prosthetic pieces that were left after the cremation process.

Evans suggested that the funeral home have the pieces recycled with the proceeds being donated to a charity.

Officials with the funeral home, including general manager Chris Dufrenne, co-owner Terry Harmon and crematory operator Aaron Bowden, supported the idea and searched for a recycling company that would suit the purpose.

They connected with Alternative Solutions USA, a San Diego County-based nonprofit that provides a cremation metal disposition/recycling service to funeral homes and crematories.

The group collects what remains in the crematory and

ships the material out to be recycled, then, after costs, sends a check to a funeral home or crematory's charity of choice.

"All of a sudden, I get this phone call from a guy in San Diego saying you're going to be receiving a check of over \$1,100 in the next couple of days," Evans said.

Evans said most families don't want to take the metal remains home. The foundation is a perfect fit, Evans said, because it is in contact with funeral homes every day.

Morales, who also is a board member for the foundation, said families of those with metal remains must give a funeral home or crematory permission to recycle the remains.

"On our cremation form it's clear as a bell, unless they want the parts back, this is what we do with them," Morales said. "We've had a very good response from the families, and they think it's



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great."

Jason Haddad, director of operations for Alternative Solutions USA, said that with some companies recycling metal remains for profit, many families and funeral homes weren't comfortable signing them away.

"We feel it's not dignified to make money off dead people," Haddad said. "Now we've introduced the nonprofit so (those who) want to recycle feel more comfortable because the money goes back into the community."

Haddad said the group, which got started in April, donates to charities across the nation.

"We're sending out \$100, \$500, \$1,000 at a time," he said. "It really depends on what we receive."

Funeral homes are required by law to ship some parts, such as pacemakers and defibrillators, back to the manufacturers.

Otherwise, the recycling program is perfectly acceptable, officials said.

"The only time we would get upset about that is if somebody was doing that without the permission of the family," said Russ Heimerich, spokesman for the state Department of Consumer Affairs, which oversees the Cemetery and Funeral Bureau. Evans said if the foundation can get more funeral homes and crematories to support the program, it would be a major help, because donations have been down recently.

And the economy has put a lot more grieving families in a tough spot, he said.



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