

# Ask the Undertaker

“...celebrating a life lived is truly the increasingly popular way of remembering a loved one... undertakers are able to create unique ceremonies to assist in putting together personalized service packages to offer families just that.”

By Ryan Helfenbein


**M**y brothers, father and I are big fisherman. Whenever the opportunity arises, and our calendar accommodates it, we go out on the ocean or Chesapeake for a day of fishing. Recently I had the opportunity to fish offshore of Ocean City, where I was reminded of a gentlemen I had met several years back who requested our services. He wanted to plan for his final farewell, being sure that explicit instructions were left for his son. He and his son operated a charter boat business, running fishing parties. The two had obviously fished together for years and enjoyed that aspect of their lives together. Due to this gentleman's love of these experiences, he requested that his son scatter his cremated remains in the ocean at the exact time when they caught their first tuna of that particular season.

Today, more and more people are moving away from the quiet, mellow, services offered by the funeral industry. Rather, families want to celebrate the decedent's life in a unique and personalized way, creating a positive memory of how their loved one affected others. For example, I had the opportunity to meet a family last December that had just lost their mother. During the arrangement conference, the daughter leaned over to me and said they wanted to have a New Orleans-style gathering at the funeral home. Immediately I started thinking of what

route we'd need to take in order to lead a band down the main streets of Easton. However, it wasn't the band aspect she was referring to, it was the culinary facet that she wanted to emphasize in remembrance of her mom. And boy did we! At the family's request, we had a gathering at our funeral home with remarkable appetizers, cold and warm beverages and outstanding desserts. They had an intimate gathering, which the deceased was known for hosting and attending with her friends. It was a celebration that brought the positive memories of the life she lived and created a lasting memory for all who visited.

What are some of the options people can choose today to celebrate a life? The answer is very simple, anything. I often tell the newer funeral directors that if a family wants to have elephants out front of the funeral home during the services, we'll find a way to make it happen. Funeral homes offer custom stationery products and video collages, but we are seeing even more being done today, especially in the area of services. We are slowly seeing more funeral homes embrace this trend and offer everything from a crab feast to a weekend getaway. For example, a funeral home in Maryland is offering packages with a local bed and breakfast for family members who may come from out of town. This package not only includes an elegant place to stay while they are in the area, breakfast each morning and even transportation to and from the airport, but a celebration of life ceremony and intimate gathering in remembrance of the recently departed. Another example, one of which is now being offered right here in our backyards, is eternal reefs. Some of you may have heard about this being done in Florida, but it is now being offered in Maryland. Eternal reefs offer families the opportunity of having their loved ones cremated remains formed into artificial reefs that are then placed up and down the East Coast, including the Chesapeake Bay right off Annapolis. (It is in a designated area approved by the U.S. Coast Guard). This service offers a unique ceremony with family present when the loved one's cremated remains are placed in the sea. Within a very short time these reefs form

a natural habitat. GPS coordinates are provided to the family member and a remembrance keepsake is offered as well.

With all of this said, celebrating a life lived is truly the increasingly popular way of remembering a loved one. We all must remember the importance of saying goodbye. Family members today need to have that opportunity to say their farewells and fortunately, undertakers are able to create unique ceremonies to assist in putting together personalized service packages to offer families just that. 

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