



Your Columbarium Project Source™

MAKE YOUR COLUMBARIUM A SUCCESS

10/14/08

To make your columbarium project a success, you can use the “Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How” approach to create a memorial program for your organization.

What

Let’s begin by describing a columbarium. Remember, not everyone is familiar with the concept of a columbarium. Be sure that any introductory marketing materials describe the columbarium’s description, purpose and benefit to the organization or community. Include both personal and community benefits.

Distribute marketing materials freely: Your marketing materials help prospects understand the purpose and use of the columbarium. The materials will depend on the stage of the columbarium development. If it is in the planning or construction phases, site drawings, photos and a sample face plate will help. If the columbarium is complete, provide a map of available niches. In both cases, be sure to have an introductory brochure, price sheet, and by-laws.

Offer an overall service: Members of your community or organization are looking for more than a burial space. They are looking for assistance, for comfort, and, above all, for meaning. For example, organizations may wish to host the viewing, memorial service or funeral to address as many related needs as possible. Some families may benefit from grief counseling that you can offer or refer.

Offer an extended memorial: A unique idea is to sponsor events related to the columbarium. For example, families may wish to publish information about the life of the deceased within the organization through a book or website. Your organization can help coordinate these efforts. The organization can also sponsor a yearly memorial service that commemorates the deceased.

Who

Concentrate on target markets: Not everyone is a candidate for a columbarium niche. This can be a function of need and beliefs. As a rule, people entering retirement will be more receptive to estate planning than younger members of your community. By starting

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with this large group, it is possible to assess response to determine who to address in subsequent marketing efforts.

Advertise to the entire organization periodically: People start planning their estates at various times. Also, sometimes a niche is needed on short notice and people will remember that the columbarium is available.

Make eligibility requirements clear: It is a good idea to let people know up front if there are any eligibility requirements, like direct membership. If extended family is eligible, let prospects know that they may purchase a block of contiguous niches or purchase a niche for an at-need situation.

Where

Help prospects find the columbarium: Provide prospects with directions and signage to the columbarium – or with site plans if the columbarium is not complete. A columbarium should always be located in a place that is accessible. Remember to include accessibility for disabled by following ADA compliance. Flexible hours are important to family and friends who may visit the niche. It should also be an area that allows privacy and reflection.

When

Let prospects know when they can purchase a niche: Many organizations use niche presales as a way of funding the columbarium. Also let prospects know how to purchase a niche on short notice – for unexpected needs.

Let prospects know niche availability: Understanding the availability allows prospects the ability to plan for their needs. Having key members of the organization purchase the first niches serves to seed the purchasing process. It has been found that as niches become scarce, demand usually increases.

How

Set expectations up front: Prospects will initially want to know niche pricing. Eventually they will need to know the total cost associated with the organization’s memorial program. At this time, it is also a good idea to provide the prospect with the by-laws which serve as the contract between the organization and a buyer. By-laws let the prospect know what to expect regarding ownership of a niche.

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Provide education: Integrate the prospect of a niche purchase with the overall concept of estate planning. Invite a local estate planner to give a free lecture. Also provide some preparation for death. Learning about the death care process at the time of a loved one's death generates additional stress. Architarium offers "*The Death Care Process*", a free article that outlines the basic logistics.

Make purchases easy: Provide an order form, pricing information, forms of payment and a contact name along with the marketing materials.

Consider payment options: Prospects are more likely to purchase when it is easy to afford the product. An organization may wish to accept credit cards. Or an automated tithing system may be able to be modified to include installment payments for a niche.

Make burials straight-forward: Create a document that clearly lists the columbarium related steps that a family should follow in the event of a death. Include contact numbers for staff and hours staff availability. Make the document available in an accessible area as well as on the web site. Ensure that the appropriate staff is versed in the process. Providing staff with grief-counseling training is also a good idea.

Help with urn needs: It is helpful to have urns on hand for purchase or a resource where an appropriately sized urn can be purchased easily and for quick delivery.

Summary

Having a sound plan for dealing with your prospects and customers will not only ensure the success of your columbarium but will be appreciated by all involved.

