

Owners Give Their Dogs a Fond Farewell

New York's Hartsdale Pet Cemetery reports burial and cremation trends.

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When a pet is buried at Hartsdale Pet Cemetery in Hartsdale, N.Y., the majority of pet owners are there to say their last goodbyes.

That's according to the cemetery's director, Edward Martin Jr., who said nearly all of the 550 pet owners who bury pets at the cemetery each year come to see their pets interred. That might include looking at their pet in the viewing room, conducting a ceremony at the gravesite or participating in the burial process itself.

However, the number of pets buried at Hartsdale has decreased slightly from about 600 a year to about 550.

"Over the last 20 years there's been a gradual decrease as cremation becomes more common or acceptable, so that has accounted for some of it," Martin said. "And certainly, I think it's been a little more dramatic in the last year for economic reasons."

The number of pet owners who opt for cremation services is much greater than the number of people who choose to bury their pet. Each year, about 2,200 to 2,500 pet owners make cremation arrangements directly with the cemetery, Martin said. He noted that many more pets are cremated at the cemetery through contracts with veterinarians.

Out of those pet owners who select the cemetery themselves, about 1,000 use the cemetery's crematory viewing room and watch their pets go into the crematory.

Martin also said more people are buying plots to bury their pet's cremated remains. In some cases, the pet owner takes their pet's cremated remains home and ends up purchasing a plot at a later date.

As a side note, Martin said the number of people who request to be buried with their pet has increased, though that number remains low. While Hartsdale is not a human cemetery, it permits the interment of human cremated remains as an accommodation to those who already have plot for their pet.

"Probably 20 years ago, maybe it happened five times a year ... maybe it's double now," he said. "It's not something that is very common, but it does happen and there's been an increase, but once again starting from a very small number."