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Cemetery Superintendent Seeks New Horizons After Half A Life **Serving Ohio Town**

By Charlie Kanet

The year 1990 was a big one. The first episode of *The Simpsons* aired on FOX-TV, an ozone hole was discovered over the North Pole, we went to war in Kuwait, and Stan Spitler, a recent graduate of Clark State College, started working at Ferncliff Cemetery in Springfield, OH.

That first job entailed grounds work and escorting funerals from the front gate to the gravesite. But Spitler didn't remain in that starter role long. A year later he was appointed Assistant Superintendent, a position which included sales, ground crew supervision, gravesite set-up and mausoleum/columbarium interment.

So you could literally say that Spitler, Ferncliff's Superintendent from 2003 to mid-2019, learned the business from the ground up.

Bringing the Cemetery into Modern Times

"At age 40, I inherited a bookkeeper who was over 60 and a secretary who was over 80," Spitler recalls, "so my first task as Superintendent was hiring new assistants for grounds and office.

"Ferncliff was frozen in the 1950s in terms of facilities, equipment and procedures, so I spearheaded the introduction of computers, a modern financial system, a cemetery mapping system, and some much-needed building renovations."

Spitler introduced tours for the public in 2003, then set his sights on a Master Plan. “We put together a grounds design that the board and I could work together on for the next 12 years,” he explains.

Tireless work brought the plan to fruition bit by bit, enhancing Ferncliff’s 240 acres of historic and picturesque grounds with new and renovated lakes, fountains, creeks, streams and waterfalls.

By 2007, the cemetery had been transformed to such a degree, the new name, Ferncliff Cemetery and Arboretum, was apt.

Planning for Disruption

As Ferncliff families began preferring cremation to burial, Spitler led the cemetery to adapt. The first 160 cremation niches were built in 2008, with an ash scattering garden developed in 2007. Another 300 niches were added in 2012.

Ferncliff added a crematory and viewing room that same year, a funeral home in 2016, and the House of Reflections, a climate-controlled indoor space for visiting cremation urns displayed in glass-front niches, in 2018.

New Horizons for a New Era in Deathcare

Ready to apply everything he has learned in a new position elsewhere, Spitler has left Ferncliff. “I have done all I can here and look forward to helping another organization, perhaps in a larger market, thrive within the new realities of the business,” he says.

“I want to help another cemetery evolve as the industry continues to change,” he notes, “but my purpose will remain the same: to help those who have passed rest peacefully, and give loved ones a quiet, welcoming place to reflect and remember.”

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