Australia Cities Sydney 24 / 14 °C
Sydney Today 75 / 64 °C
Sign In Register Manage Profile
Home News Sport Business Entertainment Lifestyle Travel Jobs Cars Real Estate Classifieds Shop
Lifestyle > Lifestyle2

Behind the scenes at a pet crematorium

Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taking an image of a Bichon Frise on a Gold Coast beach at sunrise, is a signature work of art. Dr Leigh Hobbs recalls how the photo happened and why pet owners can trust a promise of individual cremation.

Tanya Panek
@Tanya_Panek
Follow

UPDATED 2:00 PM, JUNE 20, 2022 | 2 Minute read
UPDATED 2:00 PM, JUNE 20, 2022 | 2 Minute read
0 comments

Crystal Bichon Frise, 1 yr old.
Inside Bannockburn pet crematorium

Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise.

Why can't you find Wordle Answers?
Wordle Hint: 5 Clues
Wordle Answers: 5 Clues
See all Wordle Hints

See all Wordle Hints

In the back blocks of a Gold Coast industrial estate, a group of "angels" work their magic, helping other pets for the final part of their journey over the rainbow bridge.

The crucial, devoted pets' service on attendant with Bonnie between their paws after being carried from their homes by "pawt bearers".

The business of pet cremation has started to move years but it is the dignified and sensitive approach of Gold Coast and Brisbane based business Pet Angel that has owners flooding them with thank you cards and gifts of the make of their distinct home.

WARNING: CONFRONTING CONTENT BELOW

But those final days of a loved pet's physical existence as a cremation are largely unknown.

Where are the animals kept?

Are they looked after?

How do you know for sure it is your pet's ashes that you get back?

And what happens during the cremation process?

FOR FOR FOR PET
Watch the world's best shows with DVCC. Use BRNGR Bazes from only $19/mth

A recent behind the scenes visit to Pet Angel's Bellendenar crematorium revealed the morbidly fascinating reality.

Crystal Bichon Frise, 1 yr old. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

Pet Angel founder, Kerrmein Tom Jorgensen was a builder until five years ago when, at age 50, he was "called" to the pet cremation business after his mum died. He's dealt with a heartbreaking moment in unusual manner, a promise to keep.

"I was standing on a building site next to a van's and I saw a lady carrying a dead dog out in a plastic bag, crying," he says.

"And I had a really bad experience with my dog ... I never put the ashes. My dad was a vet and I just thought 'we could do it a lot better'."

Kerrmein Tom Jorgensen, founder of Pet Angel. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

Joined by his nephew Scott Gartrell, 37, of Sorrento – who was working as a boat builder – they researched existing crematoriums and established their own but mainly admit they "learned on the job" in the first 12 years" after hitting brick walls converting vans to assist in using their business.

Then came the pair's light bulb moment.

Kerrmein Tom Jorgensen, founder of Pet Angel. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

As pet owners increasingly turned away from the sterile surroundings of a vet surgery to more private crematoria, the pair changed strategy to provide home collections of deceased pets.

Before they knew it, their business was rapidly growing as word of mouth spread.

Kerrmein Tom Jorgensen, founder of Pet Angel. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

Now they are estimating more than 800 pets a month, with 20 per cent coming from the public and 80 per cent coming from vet surgeries as owners increasingly require their services.

Almost 40 per cent of the animals they cremate are dogs, 30 per cent cats and the rest can be anything from guinea pigs, alpacas, water dragons, snakes, rats, rabbits, birds, chickens and cows fits.

It is the promise of an individual cremation – ensuring the returned ashes are only those of the deceased pet – and the dignified and strict procedures that Pet Angel operates under that has led to their success.

Inside the Bannockburn Pet Crematorium. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

"If you're a pet lover, you put yourself in that situation," says Jorgensen as he describes how the Pet Angel team approaches the very difficult "home collections".

Often these are teary adults and heartbreaking children standing around their dog who may have died suddenly. Others are angry, while some show little emotion.

"We get the extremes of grief – angry, abuse, we've seen it all," Jorgensen says.

"We put people who can't let them go and people who bring the pet over in a VR box and hand it over.

"We are big, muscular men dressed over losing a little Maltese ... seeing kids and the elderly lose their pets is the hardest."

Whatever the situation, sensitivity is key.

"We go to the door without anything, we don't take payment upfront. We introduce ourselves, go in and talk talk talk to the owners, get the pet and talk about what happened ... generally you just be a lovely human," says Jorgensen.

They refer to the pet by name and when the family is ready, they put a keepsake or hand print in the cremation chamber, a tiny piece of fur, a photo, a collar, a toy, a note. They also have the honour of being publicists, give them time to say their final goodbyes at the van and then they drive off very slowly as a sign of respect.

Inside the Bannockburn Pet Crematorium. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

The pick-ups can turn bizarre though.

Gartrell recalls an owner once requested that he stay with the deceased dog and watch the full half a a litter of Pulgis game because the owner wanted that last experience with his pet.

Another time, a Boston crash had him doing radio shots with those on a final send-off to their pet.

Scott Gartrell, Pet Angel and Kerrmein Jorgensen, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

In a spine-tingling moment, one prison brought their (still well and vital) alsey dog to the crematorium to meet Jorgensen and the team before they took him to be euthanased.

"They are sticks in my mind, I still get goosebumps thinking about that," he says with a shudder.

At Pet Angel HQ, a Bannockburn Ranch a set up like a farmed parlour where grieving owners hold services for their beloved pets.

There's a lounge and rows of seats, a TV for phone slide shows and a table where the pet is laid out in a rug.

They've had everything from Maori funeral dancing, the baby and an Italian couple burning incense in a Japanese couple grouping a beautiful casket filled with flowers.

"The (Indian) couple burst about 700 sticks of incense," Jorgensen laughs as he coughs at the memory.

Inside the Bannockburn Pet Crematorium. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

Inside the Bannockburn Pet Crematorium. Photo by Dr Leigh Hobbs, taken on Gold Coast beach at sunrise. Photo: Supplied

"Other people like to see their pet go in and cremated," he says.

"Some people like to see their pet go in alone with their eyes because they don't want the industry that they've contacted individually," Jorgensen says.

It's the promise of individual cremation that Jorgensen takes so seriously.

The crematorium operates almost exactly like a human crematorium with multiple refrigerated ie plus to ensure pets aren't mixed up.

Upon arrival, a stainless-steel tag is attached to the pet's leg before it is wrapped in a body bag with their documentation paper and put in the refrigerated mortuary.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell and Kerrmein Jorgensen, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

On the date of the mortuary, a board lists the full names of each pet.

When it comes time for cremation, a pure prior is taken on a special card for the family to sign, which has "not to cut and put in the bonpoints box (bell-cows also include the ear, dried with ashes.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

Jorgensen's other nephew Mark Gartrell, 34, of Burnside, is the crematorium manager and he wonders around pulsing and chanting in the pet – calling it by name – as he prepares to transfer it into one of five large crematoria – each with three individual chambers.

Some owners will request pets are cremated with their favorite toys, others have head and flowers.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

All pelter dogs are cremated at Pet Angel and they have a sand-off to be their public service days – their custom urns wrapped in an Australian flag image with their photo and large number.

The stainless-steel mug that is attached to the pet's leg is removed and hung outside of the chamber along with the paperwork – a double precaution to ensure there is no density with up.

Inside the chamber a huge jet flame works quickly, reducing the pet to bone and ashes.

The cremator reaches up to 1120C.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

All pelter dogs are cremated at Pet Angel and they have a sand-off to be their public service days – their custom urns wrapped in an Australian flag image with their photo and large number.

The stainless-steel mug that is attached to the pet's leg is removed and hung outside of the chamber along with the paperwork – a double precaution to ensure there is no density with up.

Inside the chamber a huge jet flame works quickly, reducing the pet to bone and ashes.

The cremator reaches up to 1120C.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

Large dogs are the first ones off the ends each morning and take about two hours to complete cremation.

After that, the nursing her chambers work quickly, medium dogs take about 20-25 minutes to continue while cats take a very quick 10-15 minutes.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

The ash and bones are raked out into a tray and the contents of the chamber are swept out and placed into a stainless-steel bowl and other evidence of surgery remain intact, with some owners asking for them back.

The cleanliness sage are uncured down in the tray where the ashes cool for about 15 minutes before being moved to an oil-processing machine that grinds the remaining bones down to a fine ash.

A 20kg 40kg is reduced to just a 900g bag of ash.

The bagged ashes are marked with the pet's name and the identification tags follow the ashes wherever they go.

"It is detailed flow or no risks," says Jorgensen. "We cremat make mistakes in this industry."

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

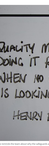
Whole Gourself will remain more than 20 pies a day – and another 20 will be processed in the Brisbane crematorium.

It's a long juggling act as he simultaneously manages the delicate timeframes required for each of the pets in the six individual chambers.

If the horses a pet in the tea bag, there'll be one little left of the animal.

Despite the morbid nature of the job, he never loses sight of his extremely important duty to himself a pet with the dignity they deserve after giving a lifetime of unconditional love.

Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

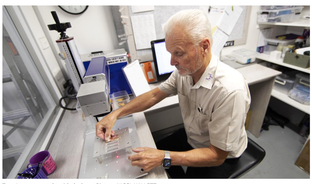


Pet Angel Manager Jack Gartrell, Pet Angel, at Bannockburn. Photo: Supplied

Pet Angel Cremation Manager Wade Gunnell takes his role to farewell pets with dignity very seriously. Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

There are custom urns, coffins, teddy bears and lockets that allow fur-parents to customise the final resting place of their pet.

However, the majority choose wooden urns made by Pet Angel that are personalised with favourite photos of the pet printed on each side and a laser-engraved plate with the pet's name – all of which are produced on site.



Tom Jorgensen works with the laser. Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

The finished tags for the urns. Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

For owners who don't want their pet back, Pet Angel also saves them from the previous vet option of a less dignified disposal at the rubbish dump by cremating groups together.

The ashes are then scattered on a mountain at Jorgensen's northern NSW property, Eden Ridge Farm.

This mortuary holds all the pets where owners have elected for a group cremation. Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

The crematorium also has a room of unclaimed ashes.

Most owners pick their fur-baby up but there are some that Pet Angel have kept for more than two years – hoping the owner will one day return.

"Some people haven't had enough money or can't bring themselves to pick them up and they've said to us, 'Can you please look after my pet until I'm ready?'," Jorgensen says.

"And we'll do that."

Then there's the goodwill work.

Just a few weeks ago, a cat died in a house fire at Ashmore and Pet Angel cremated it free of charge for the distraught owner.

Some of the personalised urns. Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

When it comes to why he willingly surrounds himself with heartbreak every day, Jorgensen simply says, "I don't know how we handle it.

"You know you are helping people at the end of the day by giving their pet dignity and respect," he says.

"When you build a house, people don't ring you saying, 'Gee this is a great house', they ring saying the door handle fell off … but here, people ring you up and say 'thank you'.

"You know you are doing something good for other people in their time of grief."

And the sea of thank you cards and notes pinned to the wall just past the front entrance is evidence of that.

More Coverage

Why dogs eat grass

Top 10 Brisbane dog names, breeds revealed

Join the conversation (34 comments)

More related stories

QWeekend

Shock death of controversial ballet choreographer

The ballet world has been rocked by the sudden death of 35-year-old British choreographer Liam Scarlett, who was accused of sexual misconduct.

QWeekend

39 things that confirm you're a dog person: Buttle

Have an Instagram page for your dog, or ever ordered a puppaccino at a café? You're a certifiable dog lover.

15

Good Afternoon Deanna

Recommended based on what you've read

North

Months of disruption: Work schedule for Brisbane transitway

0

Moreton

Semi-naked stripper bashed doing raunchy body shots, man jailed

Bundaberg

REVEALED: Plans for former Avoca Aldi site

0

Promoted Content

Reconnect in this lush escape

With lush rainforests, spectacular lookouts, and plenty of luxe accom, the Sunshine Coast Hinterland could be the most romantic region in Australia.

Trending now

Lifestyle

Umbilical Brothers opening night a disaster, but fans still …

Education-Queensland

PMSA chair Morgan Parker quits 13 months after taking on the…

Truecrimeaustralia

Bernard John Robbins, 59, jailed for murder of his brother K…

Sport

NRL 2021: Broncos coach Kevin Walters confirms he will bring…

Business

Cairns is the new Bali, research suggests, as COVID changes …

Most commented

Revealed: Stunning Broncos snub forced Dearden out

139

'Racist' Queenslanders called out over 'repulsive' video

126

Dutton reveals Australian troops' new mission

98

Kate Jones, Graham Quirk among names tipped for Olympic gigs

49

PM unmoved by push for Qld quarantine facility

41

gorman

A NOTE ABOUT RELEVANT ADVERTISING: We collect information about the content (including ads) you use across this site and use it to make both advertising and content more relevant to you on our network and other sites. Find out more about our policy and your choices, including how to opt-out.

Nationwide News Pty Ltd © 2020. All times AEST (GMT +10). Powered by WordPress.com VIP

Privacy policy Relevant ads opt-out Cookie policy Terms of use