



Dawning of a New Day

**Rushnell Family Services opens Ontario's
first funeral home-owned crematorium**





Rushnell Funeral Centre located in Trenton, Ont.

Dawning of a New Day

Rushnell Family Services opens Ontario's first funeral home-owned crematorium

By Lisa Johnston

Your Canadian authorized Federal Coach Dealer

LIMCO INC.

PROFESSIONAL COACH DEALER



★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FEDERAL
 COACH • LIMO

Exclusive Distributors of all Federal Coach Products; Cadillac, Lincoln, Hearse & Limousine. First Call Van Chrysler Town & Country.

JEAN LOUIS GARON
 JEAN.GARON@CGOCABLE.CA
 MONTREAL, CANADA

800.567.5467
 WWW.LIMCO.QC.CA

On July 1, 2012 the landscape of Ontario's death-care profession changed forever. New legislation came into effect combining the Cemeteries Act (revised) and the Funeral Directors and Establishments Act after years of consultation with cemetery/crematorium owners, funeral establishment owners, funeral directors, transfer service owners, consumer groups and others related to the funeral profession. In simple terms, this new legislation now allows co-ownership of all bereavement businesses including cemeteries, crematoriums, funeral homes and transfer services. It also allows for crematoriums to be established on or off cemetery lands. Introducing a number of firsts for Ontario, the new legislation will likely alter the death-care profession throughout the province.

Holding a strong market share of the funeral business on the eastern side of Toronto, the Rushnell family did not sit quietly waiting for the new legislation to be official this past summer. Instead they were hard at work securing a location and getting appropriate environmental and zoning approvals to open what would be Ontario's first crematorium located off of a cemetery property and owned by a funeral home.

Established in 1961 by Douglas Rushnell, Rushnell Funeral Centre – located in Trenton, Ontario – quickly became prosperous and purchased a second location, John R. Bush Funeral Home in Belleville, in 1974. From there the business expanded to add Walas Funeral Home (Brighton), Stirling Funeral Chapel (Stirling), Frankford Funeral Chapel

(Frankford) and Belleville Funeral Home and Chapel (Belleville). Today, the six funeral homes, falling under the umbrella of Rushnell Family Services, assist over 700 families per year while the Rushnell family and their staff also operate a limousine service as well as a transfer service.

Do to their numbers and multiple locations, Craig Rushnell, vice president of Rushnell Family Services and son of Douglas, says it just made sense to take the immediate leap into crematorium ownership. According to Rushnell, not only will the crematorium offer them convenience and cost-savings, but will also provide their client families with additional comfort knowing their deceased loved one is being cared for by the same facility, from the moment the body arrives at the funeral home until the final disposition.

"With our multiple locations and with the increasing number of cremations we are seeing, we decided to go ahead with the opening of our own crematorium," says Craig Rushnell, who was licensed as a funeral director in 1992. "While the legislation was in the works, we went ahead and started working on the approvals. The main reason was for the convenience of being able to do it ourselves but to also offer families that we can do everything right here for them.... Families appreciate the fact that the funeral director making the arrangements is the same person delivering the body to the crematorium."

Rushnell adds, "They take comfort in knowing that we take care of everything. When you use an outside crematorium the body can be waiting for maybe two or three days. When we do it ourselves, they can be held at the funeral home and taken to the retort only when they are scheduled to go in. Therefore they are not left in a garage overnight and having less people involved adds more security and less room for errors."

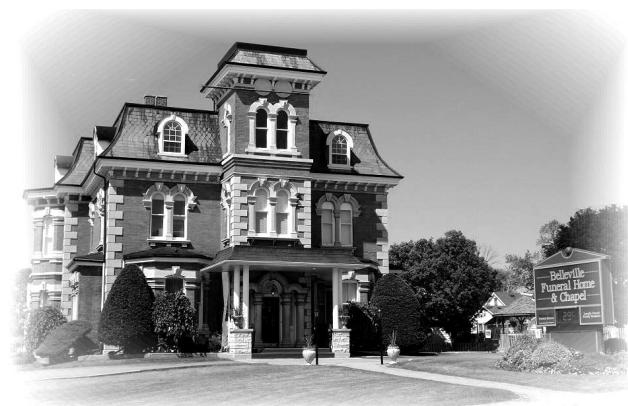
The process to add the crematorium started with the purchase of a warehouse in Belleville's industrial area, approximately a five-minute drive from the largest of the family's facilities – John R. Bush Funeral Home. As all of the funeral homes are located in residential areas, the Rushnells believed it would be easier to get approvals for a crematorium in an industrial area versus a neighbourhood surrounded by houses and schools. With space constraints at their facilities also being an issue, it just made sense to have the crematorium operate as a different arm of the company at a different location.



Founder Douglas Rushnell with his son, Craig Rushnell, vice president of Rushnell Family Services.



John R. Bush Funeral Home located in Belleville, Ont.



Belleville Funeral Home and Chapel.

"The crematorium is located off-site in a 30,000-square-foot warehouse where we also keep our fleet of vehicles," explains Rushnell. "It sits on five acres and was already zoned industrial. From there it took about 10 months to get everything fully licensed. First I had to go through the steps with the Ministry of Environment, as for the air and noise application, and then I had to file the application for the crematorium with the municipality."

Currently there is one stand-alone retort in the facility, although there is room for more if the numbers eventually warrant the addition of a second unit. The retort itself was ordered through Dodge from Crematory Manufacturing and Service located in Tulsa, Oklahoma. In the first three months, it performed over 100 cremations and Rushnell expects to do approximately 500 cremations in a calendar year.

"Volume-wise it just made sense for us to go out and do this on our own," says Rushnell. "Now we can schedule the cremation for any time we want whether that be weekends or evenings, whereas the cemeteries generally closed at four o'clock and were not open on weekends. We can also wait until we have two or three, then it is more efficient to run the machine. We are also in a better situation to serve our families' needs and accommodate their schedules more readily.... The crematorium allows us to have the remains back whenever we want. Therefore, we can offer more cremation services and different alternatives such as evening and weekend services. There is no limit when you are able to do it yourself; we are more flexible." This is also complemented with the fact that every Rushnell location has reception facilities allowing families to plan everything through one trusted source.

Prior to the official opening of the crematorium on September 19, 2012 – officially known as Quinte Cremation Services – Rushnell and his staff of approximately 30 employees were using a local cemetery for all their cremation needs. They have made the new crematorium open to other funeral homes in the area and have currently started serving a couple of their nearby competitors.

While there has been talk throughout Ontario by funeral home owners as to whether or not they should add a crematorium to their facility, Rushnell says it is important to carefully analyze numbers to ensure it will be a worthwhile venture while also checking local environmental and municipal zoning laws.

"For funeral homes that have enough volume, the biggest thing will be getting approval through their own municipality. The next biggest thing is the perception. Most funeral homes are in residential areas and I have heard some of the funeral homes that want to do this have received a lot of backlash from their neighbours or the municipality for the



Crematorium operator Joe Hideg.

While Rushnell's two other children are too young to make a career decision, he is hoping they will make the choice to be involved in the long-standing family business.

simple fact they are not aware of how clean the machines are now."

Rushnell adds, "The regulations in Ontario require that you preheat your retort up to 1800 degrees before you can put a body in. A lot of units that were grandfathered in over the years – and this varies by province – only heated up to 600 or 800 degrees. As a result, they had poor emissions, whereas a new unit is up to standards and is monitored. They burn quite clean. By looking at the outside stack, you wouldn't even know there was anything coming out of it – it is just clear."

Despite the obstacles, Rushnell says the family is very proud of what they have accomplished with the first funeral home-owned crematorium in the province. With no plans to slow down – Rushnell's daughter Ashley is currently completing her apprentice – the crematorium will surely cement their facilities further in the communities they call home.

"We truly are a family business," says Rushnell. "One thing we can offer in the area that no other funeral home can is that you are really dealing with family. We've grown up in these communities and we put back into the communities as well."

While Rushnell's dad, Douglas, is still active in the business and continues to live above the Trenton location in what was once the family's home, Rushnell says they are planning for the next generation of Rushnells taking over the business one day. While Rushnell's two other children are too young to make a career decision, he is hoping they will make the choice to be involved in the long-standing family business.

"We have the third generation coming up and we want to keep moving forward with everything that we are doing," explains Rushnell. "We are probably the largest family-owned business in the area east of Toronto and we have no intention of ever selling. Cremation is a key to enabling our growth into the future and that is why the crematorium plays a strong part of our future." ❄️