

Modern memorial services: celebrating life amid loss

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“A death in the family is a highly stressful time, when its members must not only deal with intense feelings but also with the practical necessities of both wake and interment,” says Antonio “Tonyboy” Quiogue Jr., director of mortuary operations of recently merged Nacional Memorial Homes and Heritage Park Mortuary under the ownership of Rosehills Memorial Management Phils., Inc.

Quiogue is a leading industry figure whose family built Nacional Memorial Homes, a national institution that in the past 100 years, has provided mortuary services for eight Philippine presidents and the country’s leading families.

“Most families don’t know what to expect when they step into a funeral home. We present them with the options to help them think more clearly about how their needs can best be met with the means available,” he explains.

“And we can offer advice on how they could go about making the necessary arrangements properly. Also, we solicit their inputs on what they would like to have as part of our service. It’s better to visit the mortuary and not just make phone inquiries. And it’s a good idea to compare packages, facilities and venues. There are different choices available. A dignified service can be held within reasonable budget parameters.”

“We suggest that the bereaved family think about celebrating the life of the member who has passed on,” says Hazel Villamayor-Pedro, senior manager at Heritage Park Mortuary.

“Conventionally, a wake is a painful ordeal which leaves sad memories. In contrast, families whom we have served often express appreciation that bidding goodbye to a member was made more personal and more meaningful by a contemporary approach to memorial services.

“Focusing on a person’s life rather than death is a more recent trend,” she says. “I always feel rewarded and enriched when families whom we have served greet us like close friends when we meet them again.”

Of course, says Quiogue, the family can opt to hold a more traditional wake, for instance one where religious services are key. “Or, as we would suggest, they can celebrate the life of the deceased member with other elements, such a themed venue, music that has meaning to them, a personalized memorial program with a candlelight ceremony, good food and a memorial table with a flower setup.”

He observes that younger family members tend to be more open to the idea of a modern memorial observance.

Pedro mentions that Heritage Park Mortuary was recognized recently by the International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (IIFA) based in the US, for its innovative coffee-table books that highlight the life rather than death of a family member.

“Filipinos are still conservative and traditional about memorial services. But times are changing. Honoring the memory and not simply dwelling on the loss of a loved one is a positive thing. A family can find great comfort in celebrating life amid loss,” concludes Quiogue.

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