

A photograph showing a man in a dark suit and a woman in a purple top and white jacket standing in a modern, brightly lit crematorium. They are looking at a large, stainless steel cremation chamber on a raised platform. The room has large windows and a tiled floor. A colorful abstract painting is visible on the wall to the right.

# Expanding Access and Elevating Standards to Reshape Cremation Services

by Alex Kelley-Matthews

**A**s cremation rates in the United States continue their steady rise—now surpassing 62% nationwide—the funeral profession faces a fundamental operational challenge: how to meet growing demand without overextending resources or navigating increasingly complex regulatory environments. Monarch Care Centers, developed by Foundation Partners Group, represent a strategic response to that challenge, offering scalable, compliant and accessible cremation solutions for both affiliated and independent funeral homes.

## Removing Barriers to Crematory Access

The rapid growth of cremation has not been matched by a proportional increase in crematory infrastructure. Building and operating a crematory requires significant capital investment, specialized expertise and the ability to navigate stringent zoning and environmental regulations—barriers that can be prohibitive, particularly for independent operators.

Monarch Care Centers addresses this gap with a national network of more than 24 cremation centers. Capacity is extended outward, effectively “democratizing” access to professional, dependable and affordable cremation services. The result: funeral homes that may otherwise be unable to offer in-house cremation can now serve cremation families with confidence, consistency and transparency—without the burden of ownership.

## A Partnership Model That Preserves Funeral Home Identity

The operating model we developed is designed to integrate seamlessly with both Foundation Partners-affiliated and

independent funeral homes. Our cremation centers already serve funeral homes within the Foundation Partners network. With consistent quality standards, this centralized cremation operation supports a network of funeral home locations. They don’t have to manage crematory operations, maintain equipment or navigate the regulatory complexity of running a cremation facility—that’s our job. This frees up funeral home leaders to focus entirely on family service, community engagement and growing their business.

The approach with independent funeral homes is intentionally similar—but with a critical distinction: the funeral homes retain full control of the family relationships. They handle the arrangements, the services and the memorialization. Monarch operates strictly as a trade partner, providing back-end infrastructure while remaining invisible to the family. This allows independent firms, institutions and government agencies to maintain their brand identity, service philosophy and community presence, while gaining access to comprehensive cremation services, including: large-capacity, climate-controlled secure decedent storage; state-of-the-art cremation equipment; options for private viewing and witnessed cremations; transportation and preparation services (where applicable); and stringent chain-of-custody and compliance protocols.

## Addressing Regulatory and Community Constraints

One of the most significant advantages Monarch offers is relief from the regulatory hurdles associated with crematory development. As highlighted in recent industry discussions, zoning restrictions and environmental regulations have

become major obstacles. In many regions, even well-capitalized funeral homes find it nearly impossible to secure permits for new crematories due to community resistance and evolving environmental standards.

The Seattle-Tacoma market provides a clear example. With a cremation rate exceeding 80%, demand is high—yet permitting new facilities is exceptionally difficult. Our Care Center in Kent, Washington, was established to meet that demand, offering capacity to serve families across the region regardless of which funeral home they choose.

For independent operators in similarly constrained markets, we provide a practical and immediate solution: access without the delay, uncertainty or the political complexity of new construction.

### Investing in People and Process

Beyond physical infrastructure, optimizing operational processes is essential to improving service quality. One of the most significant—and often overlooked—opportunities lies in standardizing cremation operations. The transfer of information from the family to the funeral director and to the crematory team requires accurate documentation, institutional knowledge and disciplined continuity to ensure every step is executed correctly.

Our network of cremation centers is operated by seasoned industry professionals committed to efficiency, consistency and technical excellence. By developing standardized workflows and applying them consistently across all locations, we remove variability and operational uncertainty, regardless of fluctuations in caseload or staffing.

A standardized process—applied without exception—reduces risk and improves outcomes. Without this discipline, individual team members may be forced to rely on undocumented institutional knowledge, increasing the likelihood of errors and disruptions.

When cremation operations are tighter and more consistent, client service improves, funeral homes benefit from increased reliability, crematory staff perform more confidently and ultimately, the families we serve experience a higher level of care.

Monarch has built a dedicated team focused exclusively on supporting independent funeral homes. Our rapidly expanding cremation footprint reflects our commitment to strengthening funeral markets nationwide. These resources are designed to complement—not replace—independent funeral homes, serving as a reliable, accountable extension of their operations and a single point of contact for long-term partner relationships.


### Creating More Meaningful Family Experiences

While operational efficiency is key, it's also important to focus on improving the family experience—particularly for those who wish to be more involved in the cremation process. Inspired by best practices from European markets, where witnessing the cremation process is commonplace, we've begun remodeling select care centers to create warmer, more welcoming environments for the families who choose to come in person to say their final goodbyes. Our goal is to normalize the cremation process and create more spaces where families feel welcome and encouraged to participate.

### A Strategic Resource for a Changing Profession

The cremation infrastructure gap is not closing on its own. As cremation continues to reshape the funeral landscape, the need for scalable, compliant and high-quality infrastructure will only

intensify. The solution is not to replace what funeral homes do best, but to assist them in handling what's behind the curtain so they can focus on what's in front of the family.

Monarch care centers are located in Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Washington State. 



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Opposite Page and above: Scenes from the Monarch Care Center in St. Petersburg, Florida.