



Life Art sales director Andy Brown (right), 65, adjusting a display of coffins made from recycled cardboard that can withstand weather conditions. They can be customised at www.thelifearcompany.com.



Ms Julia McDevitt, 41, of Crystal Remembrance arranging hand-crafted egg-shaped crystal memorials containing a deceased person's remains laid out in a double helix that resembles DNA. Visit www.crystalremembrance.com for more information.

Our dearly, differently departed

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THESE days, more bereaved families are planning unique funeral services for their loved ones. The idea of personalisation has resulted in an array of funeral services to reflect the character and passions of the deceased.

More than 6,500 funeral directors and 370 exhibitors gathered at the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) International Convention and Expo 2013 held in Austin in the United States earlier this week to share the latest funeral products and trends, and to maintain professional expertise and ethics in their services. The Straits Times looks at the selection of products and services, from the eco-friendly to the avant garde, which destigmatise death and focus instead on the grieving process. The convention wants to promote "death-care" planning as an accepted part of the human experience by making it thought-provoking and meaningful. The trip was sponsored by Lien Foundation and ACM Foundation. ashts@spl.com.sg



Architecture students Rangel Karaivanov, 24, and Marta Piaseczynska, 22, from Austria with a poster of their winning concept of a cemetery where urns are kept in a matrix structure and come forward when the name of the deceased is called. The duo won first prize in the architecture category of the Design for Death competition organised by Lien Foundation and ACM Foundation in an inaugural global competition to bring death care to the forefront of public awareness.



A body lift fitted with a sling holding a cowboy mannequin at the Mortuary Lift Company booth. The body lift, which is used in mortuaries and funeral homes, makes lighter work of lifting and moving bodies and caskets around. It also comes in handy during the dressing process.



Pendants and a ring which are part of a collection of jewellery that can be customised to imprint the fingerprint of a deceased person for memorial. The company, Legacy Touch, accepts direct orders online at www.lkkeepersakes.com.



(Above left) Mexican music group Mariachi Estrella singing in a Mexican Service of Remembrance at the convention. The display of flowers is typical of a Mexican funeral. (Above right) Mr Jens Merkel (second from left), head of R&D at Binz, a company which customises vehicles, explaining the features of their latest Mercedes hearse. The vehicle's customisable LED lights and display, as well as special features for easy loading and unloading of caskets, attracted much interest.



(Above) Children posing for a photo on a Harley-Davidson Road King bike hearse conceptualised and assembled by Mr Jack Feather, 59, owner of Tombstone Hearse. The hearse, which combines a horse-drawn carriage and trike motorcycle, is for sale at US\$79,000 (S\$97,700). See www.tombstonehearse.com for more information. (Below) Mime artist Mark Abbat, dressed in a cowboy outfit symbolic of Texas, posing next to a steel casket to generate interest for US company Astral Industries, which specialises in manufacturing a variety of steel caskets.



Mr Don Summers, 51, from Pierce Chemical, which produces embalming products and equipment, demonstrating his company's make-up paint on a mask.



Mr Robert Kovacs, 44, of Austrian company Mevisto arranging rubies and sapphires made from cremated remains. At least 100g of ashes are required to create a gem, which can come in various colours. Prices range from US\$3,500 to US\$68,000 for a gemstone of one to 12 carats.