

# For When You Face the Loss of a Pet



The Chapel at Paws To Angels is where funerals can be held for pets. There are also private areas for visitation services and receptions.



CHRIS MACHIAN/THE WORLD-HERALD

**Paula Coffee with her 12-year-old boxer, Felon, at the pet funeral home Paws to Angels. "Some people don't understand the connection a person can have with their pet. He's my baby," Coffee said. Felon has a number of medical issues, and Coffee is working with Paws to Angels to prepare for Felon's death.**

By [Leia Mendoza](#)

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Paula Coffee knows it won't be long before her "baby," a 12-year-old Boxer named Felon, will have to be put down. He has a number of medical issues, including heart disease and epilepsy, that cost Coffee more than \$200 a month for his medications.

But with help from a recently opened pet funeral home and pet loss service center in Omaha called Paws to Angels, Coffee is prepared for Felon's death.

She has spent hours talking with business owner Cherie Fry about what to expect emotionally when Felon dies, and she has planned a visitation service at Paws to Angels so she and her mother can spend private time with Felon before he is cremated. The plans for his transportation and cremation are handled.

"I feel so much better knowing this is taken care of," Coffee said. "I know the day I lose him, I won't be in my right mind, and to have to make those decisions that day would be difficult. Some people don't understand the connection a person can have with their pet. He's my baby."

But clearly pet lovers are everywhere. About 62 percent of U.S. households own a pet, which equates to 72.9 million homes, according to research from the American Pet Product Association. The majority of those pet owners have dogs and cats.

Pet spending has been on the rise for decades, increasing every year since the mid-1990s despite tough economic times. This year, nearly \$53 billion is expected to be spent on pets, up from about \$51 billion last year, the association said.



**Fry**

Fry knew the demand was there when she decided to open the area's first pet-only funeral home, but her reasoning was personal.

When her dog Chadz (pronounced Shades), a Chihuahua-Pekingese mix, was diagnosed with cancer in 2009, Fry had only a few months to comprehend and emotionally prepare herself before she would have to euthanize her dog.

"I was unprepared for the emotions," she said. And she said she found few options for grief counseling and pet-loss services that she felt would best memorialize Chadz.

"I just wanted her to be treated with dignity, but I was so embarrassed that people would say, 'It's just a dog.' "

So after Chadz was cremated, Fry vowed that she would open a business that provided the services she couldn't find.

With help from the U.S. Small Business Association, Fry worked on a business plan for about a year and received a loan to start Paws to Angels. She spent time in Arizona at a similar pet funeral home to get hands-on experience before opening her business at 11718 W. Dodge Road in January.

The first stand-alone, pet-only funeral home opened in 2004. Now there are nearly 50 across the country. Paws To Angels is the only one in Nebraska. Indianola, Iowa, has a pet funeral home.

However, there are a number of pet-loss support groups and pet-loss grief counselors in the area, including the Nebraska Humane Society's grief support and Rainbow Bridge cremation services. The Humane Society doesn't offer funeral or visitation ceremonies like Paws to Angels, said Pam Wiese, spokeswoman for the Humane Society.

Fry, who is a certified pet-loss grief companion, a certified cremations specialist and a pet and animal chaplain, can lead a ceremony or pet owners can bring in their own pastor or lead the ceremony themselves. A paw to Angels has private rooms for the visitation, funerals and receptions.

Fry also offers pre-planning and guidance on cremation or burial choices, grief support around the clock for adults and children, pet loss support groups, a complimentary visitation ceremony, funeral ceremony choices and personalized tributes. She has a number of urns and caskets to choose from as well as other memorabilia that she sells.

Fry works with a pet cemetery in Lincoln and a local crematorium for the cremation and burial services.

"I immediately knew this was the best fit for me," Coffee said. "Cherie really understands what I'm going through."

Coffee's package at Paws to Angels cost about \$300 and includes Felon's pickup when he dies, a paw print tribute, transportation to a private cremation, grief support, a certificate of passing and complimentary use of the visitation room. She'll get Felon's ashes within 24 hours. She didn't buy an urn because she had one.

Most other crematoriums charge between \$60 and \$220 depending on the animal and its size. The cost of urns and caskets can be an additional charge.

"Pet parents want more memorialization," Fry said. *"So I'm here to walk them through this difficult time and give them a safe place to grieve and mourn and celebrate a life remembered."*

**Contact the writer:**

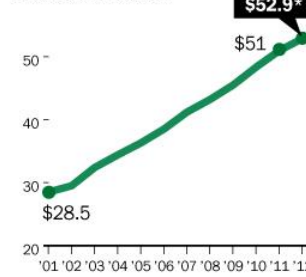
**402-444-1336, leia.mendoza@owh.com**

**twitter.com/LeiaMendoza**

## A new Omaha business offers pet owners ways to plan for and deal with a death, including funerals and visitations services

**HOW MUCH WE SPEND ON PETS EACH YEAR**

In billions of dollars

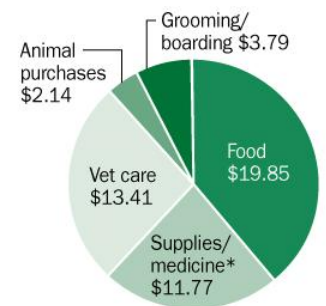


\*Estimate

SOURCE: American Pet Product Association

**WHAT WE BOUGHT IN 2011**

In billions of dollars



\*Over the counter medicine

MATT HANEY/THE WORLD-HERALD