

# NETWORK

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## INVESTING IN DESIGN

Okotoks Cemetery's Legacy Garden creates a peaceful haven for cremation

### What's Inside?

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# INVESTING IN DESIGN

Okotoks Cemetery's Legacy Garden creates a peaceful haven for cremation

By Lisa Johnston  
Photos courtesy Sunset Memorial & Stone

Located in Okotoks – 30 minutes south of Calgary – with rolling plains and mountain views, the Town of Okotoks' cremation garden expansion is anything but small. With the help of landscape architect Lees+Associates, columbarium manufacturer Sunset Memorial & Stone and contractor installer Year-Round Landscaping, Okotoks Cemetery has created a remarkable space where residents can visit the final resting place of loved ones in a serene garden environment for generations to come.

The town's commitment to landscape design is evident immediately upon entering the cemetery, which is flanked by beautiful stone masonry gates comprised of wrought-iron fencing. Paved roadways travel through the cemetery with each section marked using nostalgic signage. At the centre of the park-like setting, at the base of a small knoll, lies the cemetery's newest offering – the recently expanded Legacy Garden.

"The Legacy Garden expansion plan incorporated the existing features of the cemetery," says Bridget Couban, acting parks manager for the Town of Okotoks. "It really flows with the rest of the cemetery while still being sensitive to the surrounding features and landscapes."

With previously installed cremation space at near capacity and interment trends changing from casket to cremation, town and cemetery managers realized they needed to respond to increasing demand for cremation options while also recognizing the importance of landscape design.

Using the same grey stone motifs found elsewhere in the cemetery, the Legacy Garden expansion project added three large columbaria structures (bringing the total large columbaria structures to seven), and placed two medium units and five smaller units on rundle stone pedestals. The Legacy Garden expansion also added in-ground 2x2





Stone masonry gates with wrought-iron fencing mark the entrance to Okotoks Cemetery.

and 4x4 cremation plot options providing more than 1,700 urn spaces.

Integrating a large promenade, interwoven pathways, in-ground cremation plots and mature trees and landscaping, the Legacy Garden seamlessly blends with the older parts of the cemetery.

The design also includes sculptural steel memorial walls that mimic the local topography of the area. Benches placed

**The Big Rock Scattering Garden, located on the west side of the development, allows families to scatter cremated remains while also placing a plaque with their loved one's name on a memorial wall.**

throughout the Legacy Garden provide places of reflection while a large pergola, featuring a stone flower table, serves as a gathering place for families who may want to have a small service at the time of interment.

The Big Rock Scattering Garden, located on the west side of the development, allows families to scatter cremated remains while also placing a plaque with their loved one's name on a memorial wall.

"The design has incorporated 'memorialization walls' where families can place a plaque with the name of a loved one," says Couban. "One of these art-type structures is a weathering steel cut-out of the imagery of the Big Rock – the large erratic on the way to the mountains that has become a symbol of the town – and the other is the Mountain Pine River of Memories – a weathering steel wall which emulates the Sheep River. There was a lot of sensitivity to the design and people who scatter in the garden or elsewhere can still have a place where they can gather and memorialize their loved ones."

Since revealing the new cremation garden expansion, traffic through the area has definitely increased and Couban says it is not uncommon to see people walking the pathways or sitting on a bench in reflection. In the summer, large hanging

## CHANGES AT LEES!

What a year this has been. Earlier this year saw a change in leadership at LEES.

Heidi Redman, Richard Cook and Megan Turnock are now the new owners of the company.

Erik continues to be just as passionate about cemeteries and will be working with LEES for the foreseeable future.

Contact any one of us about your cemetery planning, design and management needs: [info@elac.ca](mailto:info@elac.ca)

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Natural grasses, shrubs and perennials add year-round interest to the Legacy Garden.



Large hanging baskets add colour during the summer months.

baskets and planters add colour while natural grasses, shrubs and perennials provide year-round interest. The tall grasses planted along the outside perimeter of the Legacy Garden create a gentle flowing boundary, expanding site lines across the cemetery into the prairie setting. Shorter grasses, day lilies, junipers, potentilla and peonies border the concrete pathways while stepping-stones through the mulched areas allow visitors to wander the gardens.

“We did a lot of investing in the planting,” says Couban. “In the older sections of the cemetery, where the plants are more established, there are a lot of peonies. We have utilized those

plants in the Legacy Garden as well to connect everything. In the growing season, it really links the Legacy Garden with other sections of the cemetery.”

Stunningly set against a backdrop of the rolling foothills and blue skies, the peaceful setting attracts an abundance of wildlife including a resident deer population that frequents the grounds and a wide assortment of birds. Okotoks has been a leader in sustainability and the cemetery has been no exception, incorporating a philosophy of multiple interments per site to extend both the cemetery’s longevity and reduce costs to families.

A beautifully-maintained 10.5-acre property dating back to 1889, Okotoks Cemetery originally encompassed one acre but over the years added more parcels of land purchased from churches and farmers. Today, it serves as an example of what can materialize when a vision is followed. Understanding the value of investing in landscape design and offering a variety of cremation interment options, the cemetery has created a beautiful, serene, park-like setting that will be cherished for generations to come. **N**