

# suburban life

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# Finding Peace

Known for its tranquil grounds and compassionate staff, historic **Laurel Hill** provides a breadth of funeral services and options to honor the memories of those we have lost.

**L**aurel Hill's elegant grounds serve many purposes. Chiefly, they provide an inimitable final resting place for loved ones. They offer a serene backdrop for those who wish to exercise, feel connected to history, or simply appreciate all that Mother Nature has to offer. It's almost impossible to imagine Philadelphia without Laurel Hill, which is rather remarkable given the era in which it was brought to life.

Laurel Hill traces its roots to a local librarian named John Jay Smith, who had a passion for landscape design. As the story goes, Smith's daughter died at a young age, and when he went to visit her burial site, he was appalled by the conditions. The early 1800s were a time of heavy industrialization in American cities like Philadelphia, and graveyards at the time were usually at-

tached to religious institutions and not given much thought. Smith made it his mission to help usher in the movement toward rural cemeteries that was starting in Europe. He found the perfect location on an estate overlooking the Schuylkill River.

Nancy Goldenberg, the president and CEO of Laurel Hill, has no doubt that Smith would be beaming with pride if he could see how his creation has evolved.

Since its founding in 1836, Laurel Hill has expanded to a second campus across the river in Lower Merion Township. The grounds now encompass a 265-acre memorial park along with Laurel Hill Funeral Home, which serves people of all faiths, races, and cultures with a wide variety of offerings. Those who choose the cemetery for their loved ones find the peaceful, serene

locale that Smith first sought for his late daughter, while other visitors come to exercise, have a picnic, or simply enjoy the breathtaking surroundings.

"Spring and fall are absolutely my favorites times in the cemeteries, but they're beautiful all year long," says Goldenberg. "There's just a sheer beauty in the landscape, with the topography and the rolling hills. Caring for our landscape is always a high priority, fulfilling the wishes of our founder. We have a very strong sense of stewardship—of our land and our buildings—and we also have a strong sense of sustainability in how we carry out our work. All of that really is born from our roots."

Laurel Hill's privately owned public space also includes eye-catching architecture. Its East and West campuses are the burial

sites for many well-known people, from a signer of the Declaration of Independence to Civil War generals to more than a dozen mayors, along with notable architects, artists, scientists, academics, and authors.

Goldenberg, a longtime city planner with a focus on outdoor green spaces, came on board in 2018 and has sought to uphold the three pillars that form the foundation of Laurel Hill: providing eternal rest for family members, friends, and even beloved pets; giving the public opportunities for recreation, from everyday enjoyment of the space to special guided tours; and providing civic value in the form of environmental, social, and economic benefits.

“We are much more than a cemetery,” Goldenberg says. “We consider ourselves to be an outdoor sculpture garden, a history museum, an arboretum, and a library—every one of our monuments tells a story about who is buried there and their connections to the area, and they’re all fascinating.”

All of those pieces add up to make Laurel Hill a truly special place. Having an on-premises funeral home is yet another unique aspect. Just as the cemeteries serve all funeral homes, those who use the services of Laurel Hill Funeral Home do not have to bury their loved ones there, although they often choose to do so.

Patricia Quigley, licensed funeral home director and supervisor at Laurel Hill, leads a team that includes two other funeral directors, Tasha Dugan and Andre Ingram. They are able to form meaningful connections with grieving families and walk them through the process, explaining options such as traditional burial, onsite cremation, and green services, among others.

“A lot of people become funeral directors because their family owned a funeral home, but none of us have come to it that way,” Quigley says. “We all feel like it was a calling. I think the biggest thing we provide is compassion and empathy, and we always want



*We always want families to have the experience of memorializing their loved one in a way that is memorable and satisfying.”*

—Patricia Quigley, Laurel Hill

families to have the experience of memorializing their loved one in a way that is memorable and satisfying. It’s a great opportunity for people to receive the love and support of their family and friends, and it’s a great opportunity to talk about their person.”

Given the diversity of the surrounding area, Laurel Hill can accommodate special requests pertaining to religious or cultural needs. They can also complete the paperwork for military honors that Quigley says always end up being wonderful services. No matter the circumstance, the team strives to go above and beyond to personalize a funeral.

“Since we’re regionally located and the cemetery has an onsite crematory, we end up serving many different faiths, cultures, and races,” Quigley says. “One day it might be a Catholic service, and the next is a Jewish service, then a Sikh service,

then a Muslim or Buddhist service. Because we do all of those on a consistent basis, we actually sometimes know more about the traditions than the people coming in for arrangements.”

Cremation has been on the rise nationally. Goldenberg says more than 50 percent of Laurel Hill clients take advantage of the crematorium, along with scattering and reflection areas on the property. Laurel Hill offers a wide selection of uniquely crafted urns to hold ashes, such as metal, wood (some locally sourced), and glass (some from recycled glass). Green burial is also on the rise, and Laurel Hill offers options at both of its cemeteries, along with biodegradable urns for those who are cremated.

It is helpful when such decisions are made ahead of time. Goldenberg and Quigley both recommend using Laurel Hill’s pre-planning program so that someone’s exact wishes can be carried out when they pass, easing the burden on the family.

“If you pay for it in advance you can lock in today’s prices, but even if you can’t afford it, at least you’ve gone through the process and made all the decisions,” Quigley says. “So if you were to die suddenly and your kids or spouse had to come in, they know that we’ve had the conversation and that you have a plan.”

For generation after generation, the plan for many has involved Laurel Hill. Goldenberg says the team will never stop striving to provide the attentiveness for which it has become known.

“The quality of our staff is top notch,” she adds. “Everyone exudes the pride and the compassion, the empathy and respect that our families and visitors deserve. We engage in active listening—every family is different and there’s a special bond that is built between our staff and families. We’re so proud of that.” ■



For families whose loved ones are cremated, Laurel Hill offers a wide selection of uniquely crafted urns to hold ashes, including metal, wood, and glass options.



## Laurel Hill

laurelhillphl.com

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### Laurel Hill East

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