



BUSINESS

Pet cremation service: Pet Angel Funerals owner Tom Jorgensen on cusp of major expansion for the Gold Coast business

The first three years were a struggle for Pet Angel Funerals owner Tom Jorgensen. But his vision for a burial and cremation service with a difference has paid off and expansion is on the cards.

Alister Thomson, Gold Coast Bulletin

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Tom Jorgensen and Fill the Schnauzer at the Molendinar office of the business he founded, Pet Angel Funerals. Picture: GLENN HAMPSON

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MANY pet owners think of their “fur babies” as part of the family.

So, it seemed strange to former builder Tom Jorgensen that cremation and funeral service providers didn't treat the loss of a pet in the same way as the loss of a family member.

That was the idea that took root for Mr Jorgensen, who four years ago launched Coast business [Pet Angel Funerals](#).

The business, which did not turn a profit for three years, now cremates 600 animals a month — everything from snakes to rats, dogs and cats and even [lizards](#).

Mr Jorgensen is also about to launch a new outlet in Brisbane — the first in that local government area.



Pictured at Pet Angel Funerals in Molendinar are company director Tom Jorgensen (back of room) with Tori and Terry Steltman and son Jake Cleary holding the cremated body of their pet lizard Charlie. Picture: Mike Batterham

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His path from builder to undertaker for pets was not planned by any means.

Mr Jorgensen said he had decided to retire from building and pass on the business to his son-in-law and daughter.

"I sat down and thought: what am I going to do? Retirement did not fit my plans. I don't play golf or go fishing."

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His thoughts turned to animals when he was working on a building site next to a vet clinic and saw a woman leave looking distressed and holding a large plastic bag.

"I realised that she had just lost her dog — it was inside the bag," he said.

"I immediately knew there must be a better, more compassionate way to support people when they lost their pet."



 Tom Jorgensen, founder of Pet Angel Funerals, and wife, Anne, with their pooch Fifi.

[EXPERTS SAY GRIEF CAN CAUSE PETS TO DIE WITHIN DAYS OF LOSING MATE](#)


Mr Jorgensen said in hindsight, many things in his life had pointed towards a career working with animals.

His father was a vet and he loves animals, believing they should be remembered in a dignified and respectful way.

"I thought along with the humanisation of pets comes a greater level of expectations from people who are burying their pets," he said. "What people were being offered was just a cremation service for pets but they wanted to honour them in the same way they would a family member."

Mr Jorgensen decided to turn a building he owned in Molendinar into a new funeral service for pets that was a cut above what was already out there.



 Tom Jorgensen, founder of Pet Angel Funerals, and wife, Anne.

[CREMATORIUM GIVES ANIMAL LOVERS SEND-OFF FOR BEST FRIENDS](#)

He spent more than \$1 million on the premises prior to opening in 2015.

Features include cremators with individual chambers imported from the US, a remembrance room so people can pay their respects prior to the cremation, and handmade caskets and urns.

Mr Jorgensen said the first three years were tough and involved a lot of learning on the job.

“We had no idea. We did not even know how much ash a pet produced,” he said.

“The first ashes box we made was four times bigger than it needed to be.”

He said the industry was vastly different from building.

“In building you would get a contract and then you gear up for it,” he said.



Nicole Watt from Pet Angel Funerals pictured with Peanut the dachshund who is alive and well. Picture: NIGEL HALLETT

“In this industry you can’t. You gear up and then get the business. It was completely foreign to me. We have staff, wages, advertising, all these expenses because if we get a phone call we have to service that call.

“It took us three years to turn a profit. There were days we sat here and no one came.”

Mr Jorgensen said he spent \$100,000 on advertising in the first year, wrapped two buses in the Pet Angel Funerals logo, and hosted a Pets Day Out event in the carpark.

He said word spread, particularly through vets who referred people to their service, and 18 months ago the business broke even for the first time

Mr Jorgensen said it had been confronting work but worthwhile.

“There was a lady with a rat. She was a nurse and she was inconsolable, sitting downstairs in the foetal position, because of her rat dying.

“But that just shows how much pets mean to people.”

His future plans involve opening the first crematorium in the Brisbane City Council area and becoming the biggest service provider in southeast Queensland. Although retirement isn’t on the cards yet, he plans to pass on the business to his two nephews when the time comes to hang up the boots.

“Was money the motivation here? I’d say no because if it was the first three years were a disaster,” he said. “I had many sleepless nights. With this business you need the funds to steer the course.”

