

# Abandoned ashes gather dust

by Claire Cooper

Hundreds of ashes belonging to people's loved ones are often left unclaimed to gather dust in many funeral parlours around Auckland.

Funeral directors are left with the responsibility of looking after the remains, sometimes for many years.

Ian Ferguson is the manager of W.H. Tongue, C.H. Barker and Sibuns, a combination of some of Auckland's oldest funeral homes.

"We have a lot of unclaimed ashes. Some are very old, more than 100 years," says Mr Ferguson.

At present he has about 200 urns filled with ashes.

Director of Davis Funeral Services Neil Little says leftover ashes do become a problem.

"I believe we would have significantly more than 200 unclaimed ashes," he says.

Mr Ferguson says several urns are so ancient the personal details are hard to identify.

"Some had old cardboard tags which are now unrecognisable," he says.

Previously the funeral company had sent out letters to families and put public notices in the paper. However there are still many urns waiting to be collected.

"Ashes are important to some people and others just don't care. We are quite careful about what we do with them," says Mr Ferguson.

The company often gets enquiries years later from people looking for lost relatives.

Consequently the companies have become very vigilant about what happens to deceased remains.

"We are setting up a special memorial area at Purewa Cemetery," says Mr Ferguson.

General manager of Purewa Cemetery and Crematorium Clifton Thomson says it is becoming an extensive problem.

The crematorium sends out brochures to families who have booked cremations, explaining what the options for ashes are, but the hit rate is not good.

"The problem is families are not aware of what the options are for the memorialisation of ashes," says Mr Thomson.

Davis's recently added a clause into its contracts stating that any unclaimed ashes will be returned to the crematorium for scattering after three years.

"To be honest, we haven't actually done that yet. We wouldn't without contacting the families first," says Mr Little.

Seventy-five to 80 percent of deaths result in cremation, because

"Ashes are important to some people and others just don't care."

it's a simple, cleaner option, he says.

The reason for ashes being left unclaimed is quite straightforward.

"Families are so scattered these days. A lot of decisions have to be made when a funeral takes place. Quite often after the funeral finishes everyone goes back home and there is a fear by some family members about making the decision themselves.

"Also within Asian communities it is not in their culture to have ashes at home. Maybe they plan on taking them back to their countries. But in the meantime they want us to look after them," says Mr Little.

Because of the extent of the issue Mr Little says his company may have to look at setting up a special area like the one Mr Ferguson is organising at Purewa Cemetery in Meadowbank.



CHANGING FACE: Cremation is now more popular than a cemetery burial.

## Local goodwill helps Afghanis start a new life

by Daniel Markham

Volunteer hard work and furniture donations from Auckland residents are helping refugees from Afghanistan settle in their new country.

The refugees are family members of the Tampa boatpeople who have been brought to New Zealand to reunite with their relatives.

Resettlement is being overseen by the Refugee and Migrant Service. Volunteers for the non-profit organisation arrange and collect donations in their area.

Jenni Broom, Auckland regional manager for the service, is pleased that many have volunteered. But she says more people are still needed.

"We have 46 working with this group of refugees and we will need 60 next time," Ms Broom says.

"Volunteers are the pure gold of community goodwill because they are donating their resources and time."

Ms Broom says the service's staff and volunteers feel good about helping the refugees. She says most are very enthusiastic as they realise their luck at living in a safe country.

"Volunteers are the pure gold of community goodwill."

"It is so satisfying to help these people who were separated from their families and are delighted to be here and looking forward to starting a new life again. They've usually been through so much and have such tenacity of spirit and resilience."

The refugee families spend six weeks at Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre and are then passed on to volunteers.

Between two and four volunteers are responsible for each family. They provide them with furniture and other items and regularly visit for six months.

Items needed are basics such as beds, fridges, pots and pans.

"We don't need the little knick-knacks that may have gone out of fashion, but essential furniture," Ms Broom says.

The organisation has some furniture stored in a warehouse as a back-up.

The reunited families are being settled in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch.

All volunteers are trained in groups as part of the organisation's volunteer programme.

## SPCA targets children who hurt animals

by Simone Sommer

Children who mistreat or torture animals are the target of a new campaign by the SPCA.

General manager John Loof says the First Strike campaign is in its early days. It aims to explore and raise awareness of the links between children's harmful behaviour towards animals and their behaviour towards people in later life.

The SPCA — the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals — is currently investigating a case in Birkenhead where two girls aged 11 to 12 were seen repeatedly throwing a kitten off Island Bay wharf.

The SPCA says it wants to speak

to the girls and their parents, to educate them in preventing such actions.

"The theory goes that if kids are prepared to abuse animals, they are only a short step away from abusing other kids," Mr Loof says.

Dr Ian Lambie, senior lecturer in psychology at the University of Auckland, supports this idea. "Children who abuse animals at high levels or extensively are more likely to come from abused and disruptive backgrounds, and may be more likely to be violent towards others later."

Child Youth and Family Services, Housing New Zealand, and the Police are among agencies which will work with the SPCA to watch for and prevent animal torture.

Mr Loof hopes that when Housing New Zealand visits a home and sees "scroungy kids and pets" for example, the agency will report it to the SPCA, and vice versa.

Dr Randall Lockwood, an American expert who studied the interaction between animals and people, brought the idea to New Zealand in 2002. It is already well established in the USA.

The past few years have seen the issue of cruelty to animals and its allegedly weak sanctions widely criticised.

Only one person has been imprisoned in New Zealand for animal cruelty under the 1999 Animal Welfare Act — a man received one month in

jail for biting the head off a kitten.

The act's maximum penalty is three years in jail and/or a fine of up to \$50,000.

Most recently, two men were sentenced to 200 hours community service and fined \$1000 each for their involvement in a dog-fighting ring.

Auckland SPCA chief executive Bob Kerridge says this does not help in the fight against cruelty towards animals, especially when the judge in the case commented: "These are offences against animals and have to be put on a lesser level than offences against humans."

The SPCA is funded by donations and has few resources to lay prosecutions.



PHOTO: GRACE EDWARDS

## Library parking turns off readers

by Tennille Bergin

Parking at many local libraries is becoming an increasingly arduous task and some library staff say it's putting the reading public off.

Takapuna Library manager Helen Woodhouse says she is aware of comments that patrons no longer use the library for precisely this reason.

"I can certainly identify with them," says Ms Woodhouse.

Parking provided by most libraries on the Shore is generally limited to a few 30 minute parks and in some cases, such as the new library in Albany, there is no specific parking provided for patrons.

Central Auckland libraries, on the other hand, provide more user-friendly parking. The community libraries in Ponsonby and Grey Lynn have specific carparks for library patrons with no time restrictions.

The lack of sufficient parking outside some libraries is compensated for by the range of parking in nearby areas, such as shopping malls in the case of Glenfield and East Coast.

"This is probably the best library in terms of parking," says an East Coast Bays librarian.

While some patrons feel 30 minutes is not enough, council parking spokesperson Gordon Belcher says businesses in the areas surrounding libraries need to be taken into account when setting the parking restrictions and availability.

"We have to consult with everybody before we make any changes," says Mr Belcher.

Staff at Takapuna Library expressed exasperation at the parking situation. It is the North Shore's biggest library with more than 450,000 visitors a year.

Despite its size, the business next

door has priority access to the carpark underneath the building.

It is notorious among staff at other North Shore libraries for having the worst parking situation despite being the largest library.

On this subject, North Shore City Council traffic services operator Tom Morton expressed similar sentiments to Mr Belcher.

"We've got to try and cater for all businesses," says Mr Morton.

When deciding on time restrictions on parking in areas around libraries, the council tries to balance availability.

In the case of the 30 minute parks outside libraries, Mr Morton says there should be 60 minute parks nearby.

This is not an option for Auckland Central City Library, which suffers from the increasing lack of central city parking.