

Lisa Kinder brought her best friend along, just in case it became too difficult to cope alone. The young woman in shorts and sneakers came to search among the 184 designated trees in the Camp Highroad forest for the red maple under which her husband will find his final resting place.

Both women are waiting next to the fireplace in the reception area of EcoEternity headquarters, which recently moved to a small forest clearing surrounded by hills and meadows. EcoEternity is a funeral parlor with an alternative, green interment concept.

Mike had often spoken about dying. Only 36 years old, he took his life on Jan. 13. At that point, Mike and Lisa had lived together for 13 years. Mike's widow was storing his ashes at home until she could find a suitable memorial for her partner.

"I experienced a sense of relief after reading about this new type of interment in the newspaper," said Kinder. "Silence and nature, those are the things he was looking for. Peace, and to be surrounded by nature. He was a farm boy and was happiest when he was outdoors."

Becoming part of nature again without the corny trappings: That is the basic concept behind forest

interment as offered by German entrepreneur Axel Baudach in Virginia since last autumn.

If you don't want to end up in a traditional cemetery at the end of your days, one alternative would be an eternal resting place in a biodegradable urn nestled in the root system of a tree. If you aren't interested in an urn, your ashes can be scattered directly among the roots.

Baudach founded EcoEternity, the first forest funeral parlor in the U.S., with his former American colleague Henry Lowe. They had worked together as IT specialists in the banking sector and in Silicon Valley. But then one of Baudach's family members died.

"The funeral in Germany was simply not very nice," he recalled. Baudach overcame his alienation and began to be interested in the subject, then the Internet led him to the "FriedWald" funerals practiced in Switzerland for years. When he realized how many Germans were intrigued by the concept but didn't want to be buried in Switzerland, Baudach decided to change his line of business.

The IT man became a funeral parlor director. "In the globalized world, many people are no longer bound to one place," said Baudach, well aware of this himself. "That means that 'home' has

Resting In Nature

A German IT specialist introduces Swiss burial culture to the U.S.

By Adrienne Woltersdorf

The first forest cemetery in the U.S. is called EcoEternity. It offers the prospect of becoming one with nature again after dying.



Returning to nature without the corny trappings: a burial in the forest.

become an abstract concept. Many people still feel connected to a certain countryside or region but they don't have a favorite cemetery."

In addition, many families live far apart and are no longer able to take care of their family graves. These are some reasons for the changes in burial culture and the concept of a final resting place.

Financial and ecological considerations frequently play a role as well. Mark Harris, an ecological journalist from California, recently wondered how ecological cemeteries really are and came up with the following statistics:

A Christian cemetery in the U.S. with an area of about four hectares contains enough boards to build around 40 wooden houses. Added to this are up to 900 tons of steel and 20,000 tons of concrete and cinderblock, the residue of hundreds of liters of weed killer and pesticide, and a vast quantity of formaldehyde used in coffins.

Reason enough for many people to pick a less expensive, environmentally friendly type of burial as opposed to paying \$10,000 and more to be interred in a soulless row of graves. Individual burials in the forest cemetery start at \$1,100, including the urn. The leasing fee for a tree around which up to 15 family members can be

interred starts at \$4,500 for up to 99 years.

To make sure that the burial grove remains a natural forest, headstones and other memorials are strictly prohibited at EcoEternity. Family members have to be satisfied with an inconspicuous plastic sign on the tree they've chosen to commemorate their dear departed and accept the barren, dead winter forest setting as well as the leafy summer one.

"Cemeteries are very depressing," says Baudach, who currently operates 20 burial forests in Germany. "Walking through a forest is a completely different experience." Convinced of being the spearhead of a major trend, he and Lowe plan to expand quickly. The next EcoEternity forest will open in Pennsylvania within the next few months, and branches have been planned for other states.

In Switzerland and Germany, forest interment is now a popular alternative. Companies like Ruheforst and FriedWald have been so successful at marketing the cross-religious form of burial there that increasingly more municipal cemeteries are providing arboreal burial sites. The cities of Nuremberg and Essen have recently opened burial groves for tree interment. ■