

Kings Mountain Preserve

This Final Resting Place Honors God's Green Earth,
Offers A Different Kind Of Peace To The Bereaved

Why can't our final resting place be set amid the beauty of God's green earth? Why can't we be laid to rest in a way that preserves the environment? Why can't this final step of the journey reflect a wise stewardship of our financial resources? It can.

An hour's drive from Charlotte lies 36 wooded acres. Hardwoods and wildflowers abound. Kings Creek meanders through the property, which is located 20 minutes from Kings Mountain State Park, not far from Shelby, NC. It's 15 minutes off I-85 in Blacksburg, South Carolina. Turn off SC HWY 5, then a paved country road and you have arrived at Kings Mountain Preserve.

In the language of death and dying, this is a "conservation burial ground." In language that captures its sacred essence, here is what it truly is: Kings Mountain Preserve is a place to lay a loved one to rest in a spot of your choice in the forest. The body can be wrapped in a biodegradable shroud or placed in a pine or cedar casket or wicker basket. Cremains, mixed with a product that neutralizes the harmful effects on plants, go into a biodegradable container or are placed directly into the ground. Grow a tree, fern, or flowers from them that will thrive for generations. The entire process is completely natural. No ornate, expensive, metal caskets. No concrete vaults. No embalming, thus no toxic chemicals. The body has been preserved in refrigeration. It is as it was.



There is a forest chapel for a service. Sit on benches made of cedar trees from the property. Graves are dug by hand, not backhoe. When the time comes, if you feel so moved, you can stand with loved ones and cover it with that same dirt. A small stone monument will mark the spot. Plant a Christmas fern atop the mound. The mound will recede naturally with time. The fern will grow, a natural memorial for the deceased. Visit anytime.

There is a retreat center with a cabin where you can gather out of the elements for a reception and share a meal and memories. There's also a 1,600-square-foot pavilion adorned with muscadine vines that can seat 100 people. People of all faiths and non-religious alike are welcome. When the bill comes due, it will be half what a traditional burial or cremation in a cemetery costs. You can have the service here. If you choose to have a service elsewhere, or choose not to have a service, this can still be a final resting place.



There is a special section for pets. Two miles of hiking trails offer a place to be alone with your thoughts on a walk in the woods.



The gentle rolling property abounds in wildflowers and dogwoods. Birds, butterflies and deer flourish. Kings Creek offers a small waterfall. Before anything else, nature's beauty is what strikes visitors and those who choose this for a resting place.

A partnership with the Upstate Forever Land Trust guarantees that the preserve remains untouched by development or time. Together with Robertson Funeral & Cremation Service, Kings Mountain Preserve is the East Coast's first conservation burial ground and funeral home combination. In other words, Director Terry Robertson can serve a family from the moment their loved one passes until they are laid to rest at the Preserve.

There are only a handful of conservation burial grounds in the nation. Kings Mountain Preserve is the one closest to Charlotte and the surrounding region.

It is Terry's dream, a healing place where death doesn't have the last word. "When you come to Kings Mountain Preserve," he says, "you are surrounded by life – trees, flowers, animals. You are returning everything to the earth naturally, simply, beautifully. Above everything else, you're taking care of creation."

Why Kings Mountain Preserve?

Terry founded Robertson Funeral & Cremation Service in Charlotte in 2007. Left cold by the commercial side of the industry, he wanted to offer traditional end-of-life services – funeral, cremation, interment – but with a different bottom line. His bottom line is helping the 300 families he serves each year find peace amid their grief.

Over time, he began to hear a broader call to offer more than what tradition provides. The inspiration for Kings Mountain Preserve comes from three chapters in his life story.



- Terry loves the outdoors. Always has, whether it's a long hike, a short walk or just hanging out with his family in the shade of a forest. A burial ground in the woods speaks to him.
- He loves a challenge. Is there a nobler one than investing in a final resting place like this one? How about this: In June 2021, Terry reached the top of the highest mountain in North America – Denali in Alaska, 20,310 feet. He donated the \$10,000 he raised from sponsors to Chameleon's Journey. It's a grief camp for children and youth run by Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region.
- Something else besides the outdoors and a daring spirit stirred Terry to act. In 2000, he was diagnosed with sarcoma of the neck. Terry's doctors believe the cancer was caused by exposure to formaldehyde. That's the chemical used in embalming. Terry at one time handled 150 embalmings a year. (He does no embalmings now and promotes natural burials.) He was given a 30 percent chance to live beyond five years. Taking chemo at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, he could barely walk a quarter-mile around a nearby park. Twenty years later, he climbed a mountain. Today, healthy and full of



passion for this work, he is developing Kings Mountain Preserve, offering burial free of toxic chemicals, in the middle of nature.

If you choose this course, you will enjoy getting to know Terry. Ask him about his journey and his family. He is married to Amanda Robertson, Rector of The Church of the Good Shepherd in York, South Carolina. They have three sons, T.J., Townsend, and Angus. They love nature, too.

Room For Everyone

Since opening in October 2020, Kings Mountain Preserve has been home to nine full-body burials and three burials of cremains. Twelve more spots have been purchased by families for when the time comes.

The 36-acre preserve can accommodate 300 full burials and 300 burials of cremains per acre. Because the concept is still new, Terry is working hard to tell the story. He's holding Lunch And Learns around the region. He's educating clergy about the preserve so they can educate their congregations. He's doing the same with the medical community and ministries that work with the sick and dying. He believes everyone deserves to know about this end-of-life option. He's hoping that satisfied clients will spread the word.



On a recent Sunday, under gorgeous autumn skies, he welcomed guests to a Natural Wellness Fall Festival. It featured bluegrass music, burgers on the grill, booths with health and wellness information and, best of all, ATV tours. Dave and Kay came from Charlotte. They had attended one of Terry's luncheon programs. Now they wanted to see the preserve for themselves. "Plastic flowers on a grave in a cemetery in the middle of traffic-heavy Charlotte is one thing," Dave says. "This," he adds, "looking out upon the trees and meadows, is something else."

Embracing A New Way

Change is hard. Change involving something as daunting to deal with as death is intimidating. That holds especially true for the South, where tradition dies especially hard. But change is coming.

Remember when cremation was considered out of the question? Death comes, you embalm the body, purchase an expensive casket, and lay them in the ground. Not so much today. The number of U.S. cremations is expected to rise from 1 million in 2011 to 2.27 million in 2030. A decade from now, 70 percent of consumers are expected to choose cremation over burial.

What about burying a body or cremains in a columbarium or traditional cemetery? Again, less and less. Today, 54 percent of Americans are considering a green burial. And 72 percent of cemeteries are reporting an increased demand for green burial.

Much of it is driven by concern for the planet.



Some of it has to do with the loss of available land for burials. Cemeteries are filling up. How meaningful is having a family member placed in a mausoleum with loved ones stacked one upon another?

Some if it is cost. The regional average for a traditional funeral and cemetery burial is \$14,949. A service and burial at Kings Mountain Preserve averages \$6,740, half that price if the body is cremated.

Eric and Jean Martinson of Charlotte are among those who appreciate the meaning and advantages of a green burial. They are among the first to choose one when their time came.

A Feeling Of Peacefulness

Eric Martinson died on September 29, 2021, from COVID-19. He was 68. An engineer in local TV news, Eric loved puttering with hot rods in the garage. His obituary referred to his wife, Jean, as the love of his life. They had four children and 10 grandchildren. The grandkids called him Pap-Pap.

Jean says they knew they wanted green burials. She and Eric put it in their wills in 2015. "It's biblical," she says. "Dust to dust." The day after he died, Jean visited the Kings Mountain Preserve. She walked over a foot bridge to look at possible final resting places for Eric. Kings Creek ran beside her. Sunlight streamed through the trees. "There was such a feeling of peacefulness," she says. "I knew immediately that there was where he'd want to be."

At the burial service, family members helped lower Eric into the grave. They tossed in daisies and carnations and together shoveled dirt over the shroud. They prayed and read Scripture.

A week later, family and friends gathered at the Preserve to share memories of Eric at a cookout (grills are available). "My husband loved a good cookout," Jean says.

Some might consider the Martinsons trailblazers for responding to death in this new way, at this new place in a forest. Jean Martinson prefers to think of it as taking a different path to healing.

"Eric always said that when it was time, he wanted to go out in the woods and sit under a tree. This was as close as we could get."

Want To Learn More?

Visit www.KingsMountainPreserve.com or call (877) 375-2495. Make an appointment to see the preserve. Director Terry Robertson welcomes the opportunity to show it to you. As in most everything else in life, it's wise to plan ahead. Consider purchasing your spot at the preserve before the spot is needed.

