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**Resomation, Matthews International Announce Partnership in the U.S.**

**UCLA Administrator Hopes to Introduce Technology**

Resomation, the Scotland-based company that markets a machine that breaks down bodies through a process based on alkaline hydrolysis, recently signed an exclusive distribution agreement covering the United States with Matthews International Cremation Division, according to insiders at both companies.

“I think that Matthews is always looking toward the future, and we saw this as not a substitute for cremation or a substitute for burial but as an alternative that might be attractive to some people,” says Paul Rahill, president of Matthews International Cremation Division.

On its Web site, Resomation bills itself as “an ecological and mercury-free working alternative to cremation and burial.” The company’s founder and managing director, Sandy Sullivan, says the alkaline hydrolysis process on which it is based occurs naturally in nature, when bacteria help to degrade bodies. Resomation, however, speeds up the process using strong alkali such as potassium hydroxide. When bodies are placed in a pressurized vessel at 150 to 170 degrees Celsius, the end result is “an innocuous liquid of the building blocks of life containing amino acids, peptides, sugar and mild soap,” according to literature provided by the company.

Sullivan is convinced a partnership with Matthews will help promote the technology in the United States. “We realized that based in Scotland, we needed to either open an office over in the USA or partner with a well known and respected niche player in the funeral industry,” he says. “We chose the latter and have also been fortunate enough to sign an exclusive distribution agreement for the USA with Matthews International Cremation Division.”

Sullivan adds that while his company is still trying to get the process legally approved throughout the United Kingdom and the United States, he’s confident that it will soon be a “real, true alternative to burial and cremation.” He adds, “However, we need to

have the basics in place to ensure a seamless and careful transition from the prototype process at the Mayo Clinic (in Minnesota) to commercial ability. This means manufacturing excellence, ethical sales, rapid after-sales support and a product that not only meets but exceeds expectations.”

While there are other players trying to gain a foothold in the alkaline hydrolysis disposition process, Sullivan believes his company is the best equipped to offer this solution to funeral directors, and in turn, families. “We have perfected the process over the last two years and patented the aspects we are confident makes this the only viable Resomation process to carry out human disposition commercially,” he says.

### Matthews Makes its Move

Rahill first saw the alkaline hydrolysis process more than 10 years ago at the University of Florida. When Resomation came onto the scene and began presenting at various funeral service conferences, he saw funeral professionals express interest, and he decided to start studying a potential partnership. The management team discussed a partnership among themselves and after six to nine months of studying and talking with managers at Resomation, the two sides put together an agreement.

As far as the reasons behind the deal, they are many, according to Rahill. Resomation has made the units to carry out alkaline hydrolysis smaller and more commercially viable. “It’s less expensive and easier to use; the big systems I saw years ago at the University of Florida were not practical in a community setting, but this is quite compact.”

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Funeral Service Insider is published weekly 48 times a year by Kates-Boylston Publications  
Two Washingtonian Center  
9737 Washingtonian Blvd., Suite 100,  
Gaithersburg, MD, 20878-7364  
Price: \$295/year. Copyright 2008, Kates-Boylston.

Rahill also likes the fact that Sullivan was formerly the European president for a company called WR2. The company makes alkaline hydrolysis units used mainly for the disposition of animals, and it manufactured the unit being used by the Mayo Clinic and the University of Florida. "I was very impressed with their engineering expertise," Rahill says. "They have gone on to further adapt the unit to a more commercial death-care market product. We are a technology and engineering company, and their ability to grasp the hurdles and bring it to the death-care industry is important."

The partnership will be pretty comprehensive. Rahill notes it will include project management and service after the sale. Perhaps even more importantly, Matthews Cremation Division will lend its support in meeting with state environmental authorities, funeral and cemetery board officials and other controlling authorities to promote its adoption. Rahill says the company's first priority will be to get the process adopted along the West Coast and states out west such as Colorado. "Those states are our areas of greatest opportunity," he says. "We will take on and develop those first and foremost, but it's not going to be a big bang. It's going to be a slow, gradual market development. This is a new process, and it's something that must be explained."

Rahill says that initially, Matthews Cremation will not actually manufacture Resomation units, but he doesn't rule that out in the future. "At first, there won't be enough volume to justify manufacturing them," he explains. "But we will certainly do the assembly and the project management, but the major components will be manufactured elsewhere. But we certainly do have that capability."

Sullivan says he could not have hoped for a better partner than Matthews, and he believes that the relationship will result in more funeral service professionals taking notice of his company. "Matthews, along with critical market understanding, good reputation and industry contacts will afford us superb field service cover, which is essential," he says. "We are very excited about this very positive development. This allows customers a disposition method choice from a single ethical company without any vested interest other than ensuring the customer has all the required information to make a choice that is right for them in their specific circumstances."

## Reaction on Deal Is Mixed

Many funeral professionals were surprised when told that Resomation had struck a deal with such a respected company. Dan Isard, president of the Foresight Companies, says it's a big deal for *anyone* to be partnering with Matthews. "The question is, what is the motivation of Matthews?" he asks. "Are they partnering to promote it, and by doing so, might they interfere with the production of crematories, urn sales and niche manufacturing and installation?" He adds, "Matthews is most progressive in the product delivery system to alternatives for burial. However, right now they seem to be very busy in their construction side, which is niche driven. So, it is an interesting pick!"

Isard is quick to add, however, that he personally doesn't recommend alkaline hydrolysis. "I feel this process of alkaline hydrolysis is very fringe," he says. "Most funeral directors can barely recommend a cremation to a family without getting a noticeable twitch, and I feel recommending the alkaline procedure will be something not used by even a small minority for at least a decade or more."

Some funeral professionals share Isard's view. They find the idea of basically dissolving bodies as repugnant. But Rahill doesn't buy arguments that there is something inherently wrong with the process. "My response would be that decomposition – whether it's slow as with burial or quicker as with (alkaline hydrolysis) or cremation – is not a pretty thing to watch under any circumstance."

Mark Matthews, an owner with Wiefels Cremation and Funeral Service in Palm Springs, Calif., is among those who have an open mind about the process. He's also one of the few funeral professionals who have traveled to the Mayo Clinic to witness it. "It is environmentally superior to current cremation technology," he says. "Matthews Cremation Division is certainly competent to handle the distribution of Resomation equipment and installation."

Rahill is betting that there will be "slow and steady progress" when it comes to the adoption of alkaline hydrolysis. "There are some states where it is clearly allowed and for most states, it's not specifically allowed or denied," he says. "There is a lot of gray area."

The public will help drive the adoption of the technology, Rahill believes. “The early adopters will be the super green,” he says. “They are looking for ways to reduce their carbon footprints. So those are the people who understand this kind of process pretty clearly. It will be a slow but gradual process, and we don’t think this will at all take away from our cremation business. These people go for not A or B but C.”

Rahill believes that once funeral directors crunch the numbers, cost won’t be such a concern. “The rule of thumb is that this is going to be about five times the cost of cremation equipment, and the typical cremation installation would be \$100,000, so this would be \$500,000. If we have five times the capital expenditure, we can probably look at a similar ratio on the wholesale charge.”

The end result? If you are charging families \$250 for a cremation, then charge them \$1,250 to carry out alkaline hydrolysis. “If you have someone price shopping for the cheapest cremation, then this isn’t for them,” Rahill says. “This is for someone looking for something different and more eco-friendly. And typically people who buy green pay the price, whether it’s at a health food store, food, a hybrid car or solar panels on a home. When you go green, you have to be willing to pay premium.”

Matthews International and Resomation each understand, however, that they will have to educate both consumers and funeral professionals if the technology is to catch on. Supporters like Mark Matthews, (who notes that, unfortunately, he’s of no relation to the family that began Matthews International) agree there will be hurdles to overcome. “Resomation is not as easy to do as cremation,” he says. “The quality of operator will have to improve, and the cost to the consumer will likely be higher than a typical cremation. Consumer adoption of Resomation or legislative and political support for the environmentally superior technology will be interesting to watch.”

Rahill looks to the future with optimism. “We think there will be enough people interested in this alternative to justify our participation in it,” he says. “We look at ourselves at being the number one service provider in this industry. Whether it be casket or cremation products or something else, we want to be the number one supplier to the industry.”

## **UCLA Administrator Hopes to Bring Resomation Unit to Campus**

The alkaline process isn’t just making headlines because of the recent deal between Resomation and Matthews International. If Dean R. Fisher, director of the donated body program at The David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA has any say on the matter, the university may soon add a unit to carry out alkaline hydrolysis, which would make it one of only a few states in the country to allow the process.

Fisher, who previously served as director of anatomical bequests to the Department of Anatomy for the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., the first facility in the United States to use alkaline hydrolysis on humans, hopes to introduce a proposal to be considered by the university in the coming months. And he says that like Matthews International, he’s hoping to put together his own agreement with Resomation. “What we are trying to do is put together an agreement with Resomation, UCLA, the state water board and the state cemetery and funeral board,” Fisher explains. “We have to come up with the money and space. Sandy Sullivan (the managing director of Resomation) would give us a great discount on the unit, and it would be a next generation unit that would speed up the process. It would also do a lot of things the Mayo unit did.”

Once Fisher finalizes a deal with Resomation, he hopes to pitch his plan to the university. “I want to see if they would spend that kind of funding and write a six-month pilot project so they could write rules and regulations around it,” he says.

Fisher would like any unit at UCLA to be located right on campus, just like the unit at Mayo. That, he says, would prevent potential headaches. “We are just trying to close all the different loopholes,” he says. “One of those is when a body leaves here for cremation, it could get hit on the freeway, and the body could end up on the highway. We also have another problem because a body could end up at a crematory where they cut it up and sell parts unbeknownst to us.” With an alkaline hydrolysis unit right on campus, Fisher would know a body was with him and his staff through the entire process.

But getting an alkaline hydrolysis unit won’t be easy, and Fisher knows it. Even if the university approves the plan, state authorities would have to allow the process.

Initially, the head of the state cemetery and funeral bureau, which is a political position, had given her word that she would agree to allow the process. But she was demoted, and in came Richard Leroy Wallinder Jr., who watched a presentation at a meeting held by the California Cremation Association “(Wallinder) said to me that since this is an industry sponsored process, industry should drive this through instead of regulating it. And that means it could take a lot longer ... it could be years,” Fisher says.

Still, Fisher is hopeful that the process could be used at UCLA much sooner. “We are now trying to come at this through a different angle,” he says. “We want to see if we can put this in since we are a university; we could operate it six months to a year, and we could write all the rules and regulations around it. And if the state still didn’t want to do this, it would still not be a form of final disposition. We could also write in that if the state does not approve it, Sandy gets his machine back.”

Fisher thinks alkaline hydrolysis offers a whole variety of environmental benefits, and he believes it could become attractive to funeral service professionals. “It will be interesting to see how funeral directors perceive this whole technology,” he says. “I don’t know if they will be responsive and open minded to it or afraid of it or what.”

## Other Developments

Funeral service suppliers, funeral directors and the medical community are not the only ones keeping a close eye on the growing acceptance of alkaline hydrolysis. The religious community is, too.

In fact, Sister Renee Mirkes, a nationally known lecturer and the director of the Center for NaproEthics, the ethics division of the Pope Paul VI Institute in Omaha, Neb., recently traveled to the Mayo Clinic to view the process. According to the center’s Web site, it “ponders, proclaims and promotes the Catholic Church’s position on issues including, but not limited to: family planning, reproductive/genetic technologies, stem cell research, embryo adoption, marriage, family and sexuality.”

“To me, the issue (of alkaline hydrolysis) was just a fascinating philosophical question,” she says. “Is this respecting the relative dignity of the human corpse? That’s what got me investigating. I could not answer that question unless I knew what the process was.”

Mirkes says she did a lot of “philosophical thinking” after seeing the process, and she struggled to determine what Catholic principles apply when it comes to alkaline hydrolysis. She has written a scholarly paper detailing her findings that will be published in the winter issue of the *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*.

“We will have to see if my paper engenders discussion in the theological community, and if it does, that discussion would be something the bishops look at when and if they consider the question.” She adds, “(Alkaline hydrolysis) is not readily available at the moment, so we are a bit premature. But it’s always better to be ahead of the eight ball than behind it. Especially as states begin to approve it.”

### **If Your Competitors Are Going to Charleston, Shouldn’t You Be Going, Too?**

So far, more than 75 funeral professionals have signed on to head to Charleston, S.C., from Nov. 20- 21 to attend our third annual Funeral Service Business Plan Conference. We have an all-star lineup of speakers who will give inside tips on how to improve your bottom line. If you have already registered, then I look forward to seeing you there! But if you haven’t, there is still time, but *seriously*, it is running out! Make sure to be part of this great event and don’t let your competitors leave you behind. Visit [www.katesboylston.com/fsbp09](http://www.katesboylston.com/fsbp09) to learn more and to register, or call 800-260-1545. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at [tparmalee@katesboylston.com](mailto:tparmalee@katesboylston.com).

- Thomas A. Parmalee, Executive Editor

## Take Your Business to the Next Level with the Right Employees

Every company has them: employees who don't do their jobs. While you and others work hard, they sit on their hands. And when you hire a new employee who could become an asset, they corrupt them with their negative attitudes.

Sound familiar?

Well, it doesn't have to be that way. But to change things, you first have to recognize who is who, according to John and Nikki McQueen with Anderson-McQueen Funeral & Cremation Centers in St. Petersburg, Fla.

During a presentation they delivered Oct. 15 at the National Funeral Directors Association Convention in Orlando, Fla., the McQueens cited information from Richard Flint, a personal development trainer, to explain the main categories of employees. If you want to better serve families and make more money, it's imperative to understand whom you are dealing with in your workplace.

- **Sponges.** They are both a joy and frustration to management, and they are always eager to learn. With these types of employees, training is a must because their biggest strengths – wanting to learn and being eager to help – can also be their biggest weaknesses. “But be careful who you let squeeze your sponge,” John McQueen warns. “They can turn out to be a wonderful employee or your worst employee.”

- **Spectators.** Chances are you can identify some of these at your own firm. According to John McQueen, “These are the people who come into the funeral home every morning carrying a brown paper bag. You think it's their lunch, but actually they are carrying binoculars. These are the people who watch others do the work and complain about things.”

No firm wants spectators, especially because they cause constant turmoil within organizations. “They are always so busy, but you never know what they are busy doing,” John McQueen says. “They do not like sponges, and they will try to make them spectators.”

The worst part is that spectators that are tolerated inevitably become managers because people want to get out of supervising them. There is only one choice when it comes to spectators, say the McQueens: Do not tolerate them; terminate them.

- **Camels.** These are the people in your organization who you want to have at all costs. They are the backbone of your firm; they come in early and they stay late without you having to ask. “But camels still require nourishment,” John McQueen warns. “We take them for granted all too often.”

Likewise, if you don't make the camels in your organization know that you appreciate their hard work, they can become ill mannered. Have you ever had a faithful employee storm into your office one day, unload all of their grievances and then give you their notice or quit on the spot? And you, the owner or manager, are left wondering, “Wow, where did THAT come from?!”

So, the lesson from all this is to make sure you know who is who at your firm. Identify your sponges and protect them. Identify your spectators and get rid of them. And then identify your camels, pay them fairly and appreciate them. If you do all those things, you will be on the path to success.

Sincerely,



Thomas A. Parmalee, Executive Editor