

Memorial center takes care of pets, owners who loved them

By [Bob Hansen](#) | *Daily Times*

A papier-mâché puppy with mischievous eyes sits on a shelf, nearly identical to the dog in the framed photo next to it. It's easy to see how a person who has just lost a pet might want to keep its memory alive with such a lifelike statuette.

This is Pet Angel Memorial Center at 172 E. Carmel Drive in Carmel, and such a custom statuettes are one service the center offers. Presiding over Pet Angel is Coleen Ellis, proprietor.

Nearby in the same room are urns in various shapes and sizes, and charms and ceramic prints of puppy paws and dog noses. Soft music comes from unobtrusive speakers. In the next room, the top of a table is covered with lighted candles and written messages from the people who lit them. A cute puppy — with the markings of a beagle and the soft long fur of a shih-tzu — wanders about, happily exploring.



Ellis takes care of pets in their final stage on earth: death.

More, though, she takes care of their owners.

Ellis was a pre-arrangement consultant in the human funeral business for 15 years. She visited funeral home directors about how they could better help families deal with the death of a loved one.

But when her own puppy died after 14 years, Ellis discovered there were no similar services for the human families of beloved pets.

That motivated her to put together Pet Angel Memorial Center. It opened in September. It is more than a place where people can buy caskets or have mementoes made.

"We will do whatever we can for the family," Ellis said.

She does a lot of grief counseling. When a pet dies, a family loses a member and people go through the same stages of grief as when they mourn a person's death. "I do a lot of listening. People talk to me and tell me about their pet."

In fact, the lighted candle display was part of a holiday program on Dec. 11. Families of deceased pets came to Pet Angel and wrote messages about their pets and then lit a candle for them. The families could talk with each other and they could watch a photo CD of all the animals who had come to Pet Angel since it opened.

This program was held in an area of Pet Angel where memorial services can be held for pets.

Ellis also acts to minimize the traumatic aspects of a pet's death. If a customer calls, she will pick up the pet after it dies, either in the home or at an animal hospital.

If a pet is euthanized, she will arrange to get it from the veterinarian.

And, she says, "A lot of parents call and want me to talk to their children, to answer their questions about where the pet is now."

She helps people find the options they want for memorializing the pet. She has pet-sized caskets for memorial viewing. She arranges cremation and sells urns to hold the pet's ashes. Many of the urns are over-sized to accommodate not only the ashes but also a cherished leash or collar and snippets of fur that Ellis trims off as a keepsake.

Ellis also makes nose and paw prints of the dead dog or cat. These she will have made into ceramic charms that, in some cases, can be worn as jewelry.

She will make memorial DVDs with photos from the pet's life, complete with musical accompaniment.

Ellis believes Pet Angel is the only full-service pet memorial center in the United States. She has plans to change that, though, as she hopes to franchise her concept. A second Pet Angel will open in two weeks in Wichita, Kan.

Even so, it's not all business for Ellis.

"I know what they're going through," she says of the families she helps. "I had a little one that was my kid. Don't think I've had one (animal) in here that I haven't cried over."



Charms in the shape of pets, frames for favorite photos, sketches of a beloved pet and jewelry are some of the items available at Pet Angel Memorial Center for people who are dealing with the death of a pet. The necklace in this photo includes a photo of a pet.