

Queensland for \$1.45 million to service both Greencross and non-Greencross clinics. According to a press release, the business was already well-established - having been in operation in the area for nearly 40 years - and is expected to deliver a revenue of \$1.31 million annually.

Greencross also has another crematorium in NSW servicing any clinic, he said, adding that Greencross clinics located in other states use independent local providers. The head of Greencross' veterinary services doesn't have real concerns for the future of the pet aftercare industry, as long as everyone in the industry upholds the respect and care that animals deserve, he said.

"Greencross takes pride in its client service processes. Our vets handle clients with the utmost care and respect. We have a business that supports the vets, which is what I'm most proud of," he said. "Our vets are passionate about making sure their clients are given the opportunity to say goodbye to their pets properly."

Mr Maier believes the industry will continue to grow and evolve, and be an important part of a pet's life. "Pet owners need to have the opportunity to grieve properly and in the right way. We need to ensure their experience is a good one at the hardest of times. We know if the pet owners have been able to say goodbye to their loved ones in a respectful and dignified way, they are more likely to be a pet owner again more quickly and once again experience the joy of pet ownership" he said.

Pet bereavement support for pet owners improving

When animal companions die, it's not uncommon for owners to never want to get another pet again, particularly if the loss of their previous pet was a traumatic experience and they did not receive proper guidance and support from the industry.

"Just as the human-animal bond is a key driver for acquiring an animal companion, it is also a significant reason why many non-owners don't currently have a pet, due to the grief they have experienced at the loss of a much-loved family member. This is why we put so much effort in ensuring the way we help our clients deal with the loss of their much-loved pets" said Mr Maier.

Pet bereavement counselling plays

an important role in helping grieving pet lovers to cope with the death of a cherished companion and, if they choose, open their heart once again to another animal. Unlike in the past, people nowadays are more comfortable with asking for support to deal with their grief, including from their veterinarian.

Pet bereavement was disenfranchised in the past, explained Dr David Foote, veterinarian, educator and counsellor in pet bereavement for nearly 20 years. Dr Foote specialises in the fields of grief over pet loss, stress management and wellbeing in veterinary professionals.

"I found that in the early days, people didn't approach their veterinarians and vets were also uncomfortable offering the (aftercare) service," he said. "Veterinarians saw their clients in early grief - the moment the animal died. The clients then walked out the door and the vets were often unaware of what their clients were going through afterwards. Clients then often felt uncomfortable and were reluctant to call their vet."

Today, there's more acknowledgement about the importance of pets and that grieving the loss of their companion animal is a real and difficult experience for a lot of people. Fortunately, the pet industry is supported by an increasing number of pet bereavement counsellors who play a vital role in helping people deal with loss in a healthy and positive way.

"Pet owners need to be able to grieve freely without being judged. Everybody's pet is special, and owners are special to their pets - it doesn't matter if someone else can see that or not," he said. "Having options to memorialise pets - to honour them and their uniqueness - means more range and scope to personalise the memorial and make a choice that is meaningful to them. This helps with a healthy grieving process, the way we do with humans."

Sadly, not many employers are supportive of employees who are grieving the loss of their beloved pet. "Employers willingly giving compassionate leave for pet bereavement is not common, so we do have a way to go," said Dr Foote. "There are kind employers who get it and others who are harshly dismissive. Many people just take time off as sick leave and remain discreet about the reason. Sometimes, people take bereavement leave and just



say there has been a death in the family - which is true."

Thinking about the current state and future of pet bereavement, Dr Foote believes it has improved a lot but there's still a way to go in public and professional awareness.

"It's all about education to help raise more awareness of pet bereavement, including all sectors of the pet industry and the very important role that pets play in our lives today," he said. It is clear the pet loss industry is booming, and pet owners have a lot of options with funeral services and memorial products, along with ongoing support to guide them through the hardest part of pet ownership.

However, the market is growing and changing with new business ideas, pets are living longer lives and increasingly as important members of the family - some considered surrogate children - and owners are demanding more and better from the industry.

As the saying goes, 'Old ways don't open new doors'. If pet end-of-life businesses share their industry knowledge, follow professional standards and guidelines and have ongoing opportunities for training and development, they will not only keep up with the changing trends and needs of pet owners but also help to keep wheel of life turning. ■

Pet Industry News would like to hear your thoughts about the pet loss industry. Please email bob@petnews.com.au

¹ www.rising-stars.com.au/Winner/Passing-Paws-Pet-Cremations

² www.innovation.wa.gov.au/opportunity/innovation-vouchers

³ www.iaopc.com/professionals

⁴ *Pet Ownership in Australia 2013, Animal Health Alliance 2013*

⁵ *Contribution of the Pet Care Industry to the Australian Economy - 7th Edition (2010)*

⁶ <https://goo.gl/etp5Fn>