

Centennial Spotlight

1912 - 2012



In Good Company: La Paz-Graham's Funeral Home

Kentuckians start business in 1912

New owner arrives in 2007, embraces family tradition

By Alta LeCompte
For the Las Cruces Bulletin

One of the few Las Cruces businesses that can trace its origins to the city's centennial year is a funeral home operated by the Graham family until 2007.

When Salvador Perches bought the historic mortuary and crematory business five years ago, he vowed to keep the family name and maintain its traditions.

Staff members who worked for the Graham family stayed on to ensure his commitments would be carried out.

"Mr. Perches was really adamant about not doing much change," said manager Daniel Seldner, who started with Graham's Mortuary and Mesilla Valley Crematory eight years ago when it was run by Terry Graham Hines.

Seldner said the most important thing he learned working with Hines was staff are there to serve families.

"Anything we do is to help them," he said. "It's families first."

Seldner said Perches understands the family nature of the funeral business because he has worked for his family's La Paz and Perches funeral homes in El Paso and Juárez since the 1990s. The company recently expanded to San Diego.

Tranquility and technology

The biggest change in recent years has been the ability to offer service to a broader geographical area that includes other La Paz and Perches locations, Seldner said.

After Perches acquired the 1948 building at the intersection of Main Street and Lohman and Amador avenues, he added a courtyard garden for families who have chosen cremation.

LaPaz-Graham also has expanded its online resources, with a website that features a five-minute pre-planning tool as well as a tool for making immediate arrangements.



Graham family establishes business

Prior to moving to its current site, Graham Mortuary was located at the corner of Church Street and Griggs Avenue.

Thomas J. and Paschal Muir Graham, from Kentucky, took ownership of an existing mortuary and established their business at the intersection of Alameda Boulevard and Griggs Avenue in 1912.

In the 1920s, the Grahams moved the mortuary to the intersection of Church Street and Griggs Avenue.

T.J. Graham died in the 1940s and his son Rhea and Paschal Muir Graham took over the business.

T.J. Graham Jr. also was active in the business.

According to family sources, T.J. Graham Jr. borrowed \$100,000 from a bank to build at the current location in 1948, despite the fact many people said he was crazy. They maintained there wasn't enough money in Las Cruces to pay off the loan.

By the 1950s, T.J. "Tommy" Graham Jr. was running the mortuary and an ambulance service. He was known for his community service, including 17 years on the city commission, 14 as mayor.

Graham also served for many years on the planning committee for Memorial Medical Center. He headed the local Red Cross during World War II.

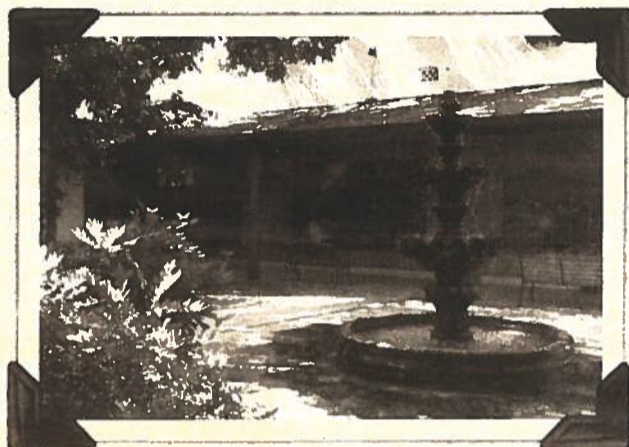
He continued to run the funeral home until he died in 1991.

T.J. Jr.'s daughter, Terry Graham Hines, continued operating the business until Perches bought it.



An early photo of the new Graham's Mortuary at 555 W. Amador Ave., built in 1948.

A hearse early in the 20th century while the business was located at Alameda Boulevard and Griggs Avenue.



A courtyard garden invites families to quiet contemplation in the proximity of scenic murals with niches that contain cremated remains.



Construction underway at the current site



The Graham family owned the funeral home until 2007.

La Paz-Graham's Funeral Home photos

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VOTE INFORMED!

The League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces is presenting three Candidate Forums for the 2012 election season. Each forum will be at the Las Cruces City Council Chambers, 700 N. Main St. Each forum will be broadcast live on Comcast Cable channel 20, and re-broadcast until the Nov. 6 election.

CANDIDATES FORUM I
TUESDAY, OCT. 2
6 to 7:30 p.m.
New Mexico State Senate candidates

VOTERS GUIDE - ENGLISH AND SPANISH
Voters Guides, featuring profiles of local candidates, NM constitutional amendments and bond issues, will be inserted in copies of the Las Cruces Bulletin and in other locations throughout the city on Oct. 12. The guide also will be available at the League of Women Voters website, www.lwvlgc.org.

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