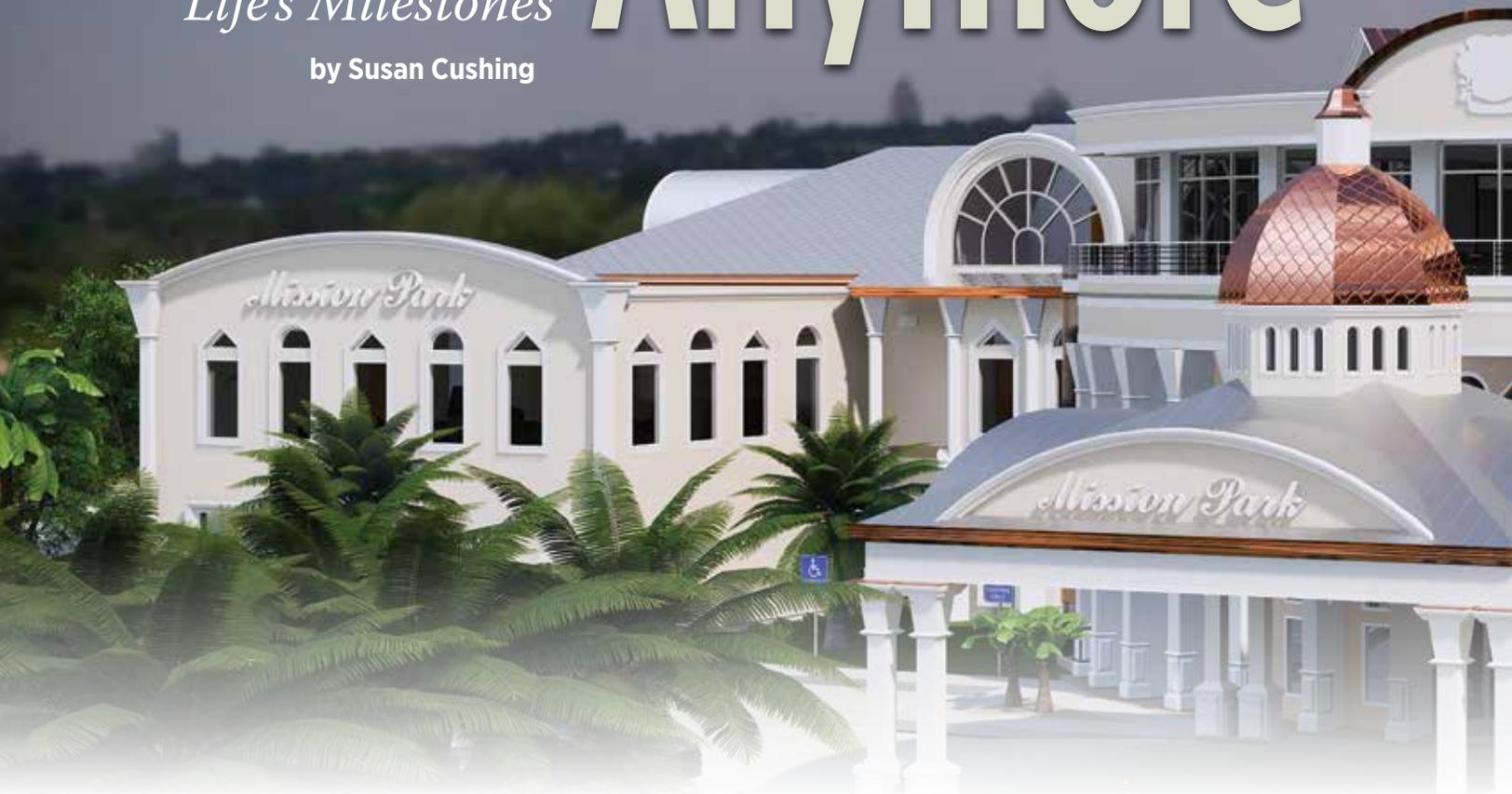


Not Just for Funerals

San Antonio's Mission Park Celebrates Life's Milestones

Anymore

by Susan Cushing



WHEN THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION decided to widen Highway 281 in San Antonio, Dick and Kristin Tips, owners of Mission Park Funeral Chapels and Cemeteries, were informed that the state of Texas would be exercising its right of eminent domain. The state's taking meant that the Tipses' funeral chapel alongside the highway would have to come down.

The Tipses acquiesced to the state's highway expansion plans so as not to get in the way of progress. But instead of abandoning San Antonio's Northside altogether, Dick and Kristin set out to build a new facility to serve the needs of families in that area. Out of the razing of one came the construction of another—a new “Life Center”—in conjunction with a new philosophy that focuses on the meaning and value of life's many celebratory moments.

“With our Life Centers, we're attempting to change the old concept of funeral homes and embrace all milestones of life, not just the end,” says Kristin. “We truly want these to be special places where people can celebrate and create lasting memories, whether

that's a wedding, an anniversary or recognizing a loved one's life.”

The expansive three-story, 80,000 square-foot architectural wonder located on Highway 281 comprises two world-class chapels, visitation suites complete with private restrooms and kitchens, and two private cremation chapels with adjacent crematories.

In addition, the new complex will feature full catering and banquet facilities, reception rooms, and family-friendly amenities to accommodate every type of event imaginable. Other Mission Park locations are already the preferred destination for wedding receptions, anniversary and birthday celebrations, and many social and community events.



Mission Park's new three-story Life Center is under construction and expected to open in 2021.



Kristin and Dick Tips overseeing construction of the new Life Center.

The crowning jewel of this remarkable “Life Center” is a copper-clad dome that sits atop the new structure as a beacon of hope and majesty in tribute to the families Mission Park serves. The dome was constructed on the ground and recently lifted into place by crane, setting a new record as the heaviest architectural lift ever attempted in the city of San Antonio. All this is being done to create an uplifting environment where everyone can feel at home while celebrating a life well lived.

Transitioning from Death to Life

We open our doors to grief, tears, and sometimes even rage. We embrace, comfort, and provide the most thoughtful and respectful services possible for those experiencing life's darkest hour. However, ours are not places that people aspire to visit, but rather do so only after suffering loss.

Mission Park Funeral Homes and Cemeteries is as familiar a name as The Alamo to the citizens of this sprawling Texas community and recognized as an integral part of its colorful history. Now in its fourth and fifth generations, this family-owned company has embraced and built upon a concept that is both revolutionary and uplifting.

Kristin and Dick Tips are transitioning their more than 27 Mission Park locations to “Life Centers,” and have all but eradicated the words “mortuary” and “funeral home” from their branding.

The couple’s newest and soon-to-be largest Life Center is expected to house a very unique feature and one that, to some, might seem unexpected. Geared toward health and improving and extending life, the Mission Park Life Center will include a Longevity Spa. This in-house boutique is designed to offer specialized anti-aging services to appeal to a demographic that can appreciate the Tipses’ dedication to make every season of life the best it can be.

“We’ll promote a healthy lifestyle, help offset aging naturally, and utilize new technology to address a vast range of physical and cosmetic concerns,” Kristin explains. “Massage, facials, and other soothing and life-extending services will be available here, so that



Mission Burial Park was the scene of a well-attended 5K Walk-Run hosted by the Tipses as part of the *Día de los Muertos* celebration.

coming to a Life Center becomes a welcoming and rewarding experience.”

Beyond the extraordinary array of amenities all under one roof, Mission Park believes in the value of vertical integration in every aspect of its operations. “By being both family-owned and having oversight over every aspect of our business, we don’t have to deal with corporate red tape or outside suppliers when we need to make on-the-spot decisions to better care for our families,” Dick explains.

“That’s why we own our own insurance company,” he adds. “When families have the wisdom and foresight to plan their funerals in advance, we know we can offer them the best insurance coverage to underwrite their plans now and for years to come.”

It’s clear that everything at Mission Park is based on providing the highest level of service with an eye toward the future. “We have big visions, but we also have big ears,” quips Dick. “We’ve been doing this a very long time. My family, starting with my great-great-grandfather, began all this in the 1800s, but that doesn’t mean we just keep doing the same things.”

Dick adds that the growing and changing needs of the people they serve have helped their business model evolve over time.

Sharing the Love

To outsiders, it might seem an unlikely pairing between Kristin and Dick, but to anyone who has spent even a few moments in their presence, it becomes abundantly obvious they are like two halves of the same whole.

As Kristin will tell you, the family business began as a love story between her husband’s great-great-grandfather, Will Harry Chambers, and his wife, Clara Mab-one Chambers. A wedding gift of acres of undeveloped land along the San Antonio river became the first perpetual care cemetery in Texas.

Today, that same kind of love and commitment not only exists between this visionary husband and wife team, but they extend to the next generation and beyond. With huge hearts and incredible generos-

ity, the Tipses are the kind of folks who’ve never met a stranger and are always seeking new ways to help where they can. “Community is very important to us,” says Kristin. “My husband’s family roots are very deep here and we honor that, we cherish it.”

Beyond the funeral and cemetery business, the Tipses are generous and vital members of their community. Last year, Kristin and Dick hosted a 5K run as part of their city’s *Día de los Muertos* celebration. Hundreds of San Antonio family members walked and

“When families have the wisdom and foresight to plan their funerals in advance, we know we can offer them the best insurance coverage to underwrite their plans now and for years to come.”

—Dick Tips

ran through the Mission Park Cemetery in south San Antonio, honoring the legacy of loved ones who came before them, keeping their memories alive. The well-attended event was dubbed the “Celebrating Life 5K Run and Walk,” featuring a live Mariachi band heralding the participants from a marigold strewn altar to the starting line.

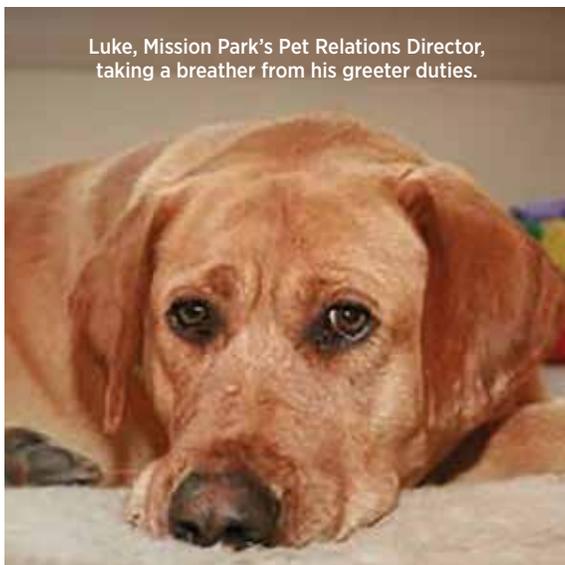
Kristin and Dick are involved in so much more—from working with the Children’s Museum to honoring veterans with Wreaths Across America. Their outreach includes visits to local schools to encourage young people to complete their education, regularly scheduled events that invite the community to honor and celebrate the lives of friends and family members who have passed, and even a therapy and bereavement program featuring “comfort dogs,” fostered primarily by the couple’s 7-year-old twins, Robert and Peggy.

Puppy Power

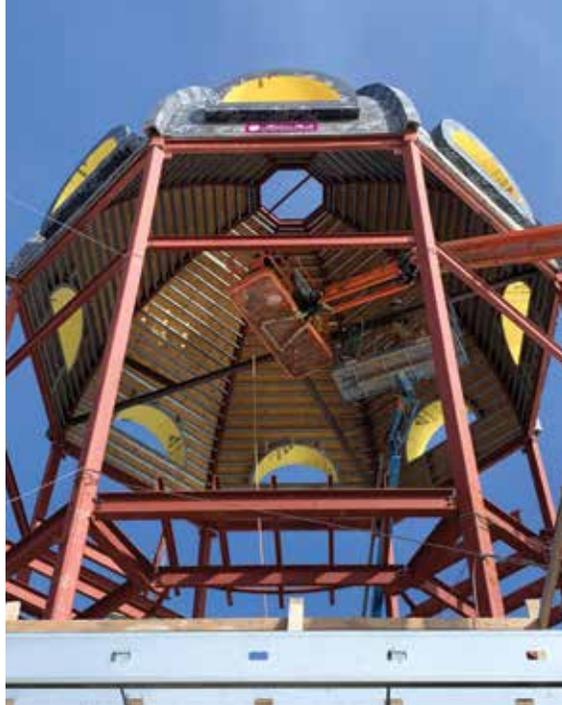
After rescuing a Labrador in 2004, quite literally from death’s door, the Tipses turned “Luke the Labrador” into Mission Park’s official greeter and “Pet Relations Director.” His duties and responsibilities included visiting hospitals and providing care and comfort to everyone he came in contact with. Recently, when the family had the opportunity to adopt a puppy from a new litter of Goldendoodles, they came home with a surprise.

“We knew that our children were going to be very involved in the care and training of these soon-to-be therapy dogs,” Dick explains, “so, I asked Kristin if we should adopt more than one. In true Kristin fashion, we didn’t just adopt one ... we adopted three!”

With the aid of a professional bereavement trainer, the children are helping to groom these adorable pups into the kind of ambassador that “Luke” was while the children learn the importance of providing comfort and reassurance wherever possible.



Luke, Mission Park’s Pet Relations Director, taking a breather from his greeter duties.



The copper-clad dome sits atop the new Life Center and serves as a tribute to families served by Mission Park.

Hands On

While Dick is busy overseeing all facets of development and construction, meeting with architects, carpenters, designers, and other employees (they do not sub-out the work on any of their projects, everything is part of the Mission Park company), and dreaming up new ideas, Kristin holds down the fort at headquarters.

As company president, Kristin runs the day-to-day operations, contributes ideas and solutions to upcoming projects, while still maintaining a very active and nurturing role as wife and mother. Frequently described as the “ultimate Energizer Bunny,” Kristin serves as a trustee for the Texas Biomedical Research Institute Forum, a trustee for the World Affairs Council of San Antonio, and serves on the board of directors for the Ecumenical Center for Health, Education and Counseling.

Given her intelligence, work ethic, and dedication, it came as no surprise to anyone when she was the youngest woman ever appointed by the governor as a commissioner on the Texas Funeral Service Commission.

“Everything that we do, every decision we have to make, it always comes down to what’s best for the community and what’s best for the family,” Kristin says. “If we’re ever at an impasse or are having trouble making a decision, we just go back to our core values and that guides us, not only for today, but also for the future.”

For both Kristin and Dick, everything they do, both professionally and personally, comes down to family. With deep San Antonio roots, they are people who first and foremost honor the values of caring for their family and their community.

“At work and at home we try to live out the words that our company is built on,” Kristin says. “It’s not just a slogan; it’s a way of life. At Mission Park, it’s our mission to care.”

Susan Cushing is a freelance writer for *Memento Mori*.