# Ottertail firm builds simple pine box

## Patrick, Karen Kilby help trim funeral costs

continued from front

elements, each item is unique to a family. Of course, colors can be used, Patrick can carve a design, or any number of variations are conceivable.

There are no specific federal regulations. The encasement can be a plain box, lined or not. Many families will line a casket with either a blanket, a favorite quilt, an afghan or some other type of fabric item, she pointed out. Plus, one or two pillows can be part of the burial.

There are many misconceptions and myths regarding funerals and how persons can be buried, Patrick noted. "We didn't know the laws, so we researched them. There are lots of misunderstandings."

He explained that the seed for the company was planted more than two years ago when his mother died. His sister started looking at caskets and basically asked him the question: "Why can't you build one?"

From that point, not only did they learn that there could be large savings in using "a simple pine box," but creativity could make the whole process of saying goodbye more personal and meaningful for all family members.

**Working together**

Patrick added, "We do not want to be in competition with funeral homes, we just want to offer something more."

The company's caskets can simply become part of a service conducted under the auspices of a mortuary. The box is just another type of burial receptacle placed in a concrete vault, or it can ultimately be part of a cremation.

In addition to the hand-crafted receptacle, featuring intricate dovetailing, contrasting woods and artistic ash to be used for a casket, then a walnut cross was added." he commented. The combination was wonderful.

Federal law states that a plain box can be used and a funeral home cannot refuse it, nor charge extra for utilizing the casket.

As everyone knows, situations vary. On occasion, a family may be faced with making a quick decision. But at other times, there is space to plan. A person may be in hospice care or a lingering illness might be diagnosed as terminal.

"We stress family involvement…'preplanning,'" Karen said. "With Patrick's mother, we had some time."

Back then, he continued, they found after some investigation that "there was quite a need."

If a person ordering a casket desires, the company will do the lining, but there is a charge of $200 beyond the basic $1,500, it was noted.

In low key fashion, Patrick indicated that most families probably have favorite items belonging to the deceased -- perhaps an heirloom, photos, a specific jacket or dress…all kinds of items accompanying the body to its final resting place.

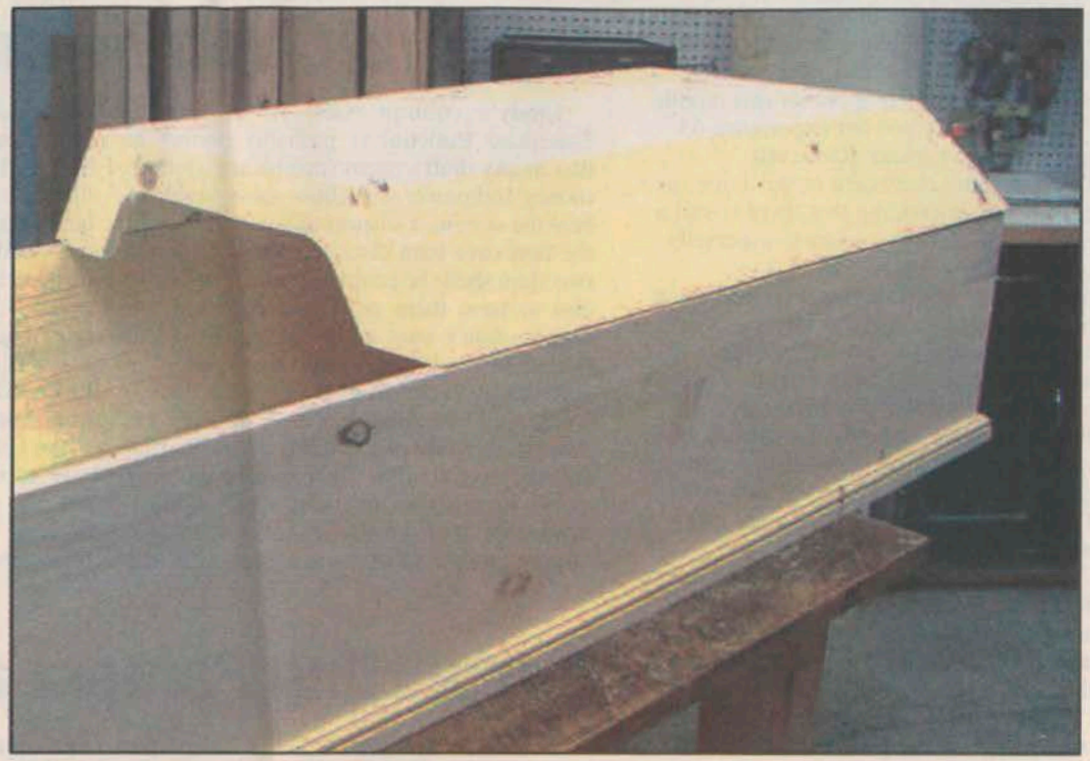
In other words, why spend extra money?

**Special requests in three days**

If there is short notice prior to the ceremony, a casket can be completed in just three days. However, Patrick and Karen are in the process of building an inventory so customers can compare designs. Another reason is because they plan on taking A Simple Pine Box and its message to trade shows in the region.

Moreover, they know there will be times when someone will likely ask for a "John Deere green" casket, or one that connects the deceased with a branch of the military, a church group or some civic organization.

Patrick explained that he can engrave military emblems, as requested, but he can't attach a commercial logo. Once the box is in the hands of the family, *then* it would be up to those individuals whether they want to affix such an item to the casket.



John Dermody / Perham Enterprise Bulletin photos

**While this casket is made of pine, the Ottertail company can make containers of walnut, oak or any wood selected by a client. The superbly-crafted product then receives a finishing coat of laquer or is hand-rubbed with oil. They are shipped throughout the United States.**

**"A Simple Pine Box" is a firm that produces more than just caskets. At left, is an arrangement of markers and commemorative items. Many are engraved in remembrance of pets.**

Patrick mentioned that word is getting out. "Word of mouth advertising is the best," he added.

**Value with a personal approach**

"We're not [illegible] everybody, but we [illegible] less intimidating

[illegible] dispel myths," Not many persons [illegible] persons outside of the industry can procure their own caskets, she went on.

However, they acknowledged that funeral homes probably have little incentive to purchase products from A Simple Pine Box.

"I'm a woodworker…an artist in wood. We're just trying to celebrate life in an artistic way," Patrick continued.

"We don't think it's necessary to have to spend $10,000 to celebrate a life," said the veteran of more than 30 years of working with his hands.

The couple has lived near Middle Leaf Lake for seven years. They refinish furniture for customers, build cabinets and unique pieces of furniture of all types, and always try to offer a personal touch, they pointed out.

Karen and Patrick were childhood sweethearts growing up in Proctor. Even then, he had started his career as a craftsman.

As he talked about their venture creating A Simple Pine Box, Patrick continued: "We've tried to get away from 'sterile.' We want people to touch the product…find it's a little more personal. We want to offer a well-designed product at a price it should be."

In regard to the typical casket purchased from a funeral home, he explained it is not unusual for a family "to pay $3,000 more" than for a basic box.

debt. Why? There has been no clear attempt on the representative's part to seek stable funding after the levy referendums are that's "not a crisis." Perhaps Representative Nornes feels Health Department is going into Minneapolis Public Schools to study potentially harmful effects