

# The Man Behind The Magic of Darst Funeral Home

by Erin Hein

I want to introduce you to my dad. Actually, you may already know John Darst. We don't go anywhere that someone doesn't stop to say hello. In our industry, we can form a special kind of bond with people, but it's not just that. My dad makes friends everywhere, even at the DMV. He is an unstoppable extrovert (believe me – when my siblings and I were about middle school age, we all tried.) He's a lover of life and a dreamer and he came by that naturally.

Grandpa Tom was a born entrepreneur and visionary. When Dad was two, an opportunity came up for Grandpa to purchase a neglected cemetery that was no more than just a field with a few graves.

With only imagination for capital and a pregnant wife and small children for helpers, he made his own path. Literally. Dad and his (ultimately 9) siblings helped grow the once forgotten cemetery into a beautiful memorial park. They dug up wild yaupon to create hedgerows and collected acorns to plant the oaks that now tower along the paths. They lugged buckets from the well to water the landscape. Grandpa dug graves by hand and went door-to-door to get the word out.

Dad connected deeply to the industry and embraced Grandpa's mantra of never turning anyone away. As an adult, moving into the funeral industry was a natural step. He started with a national funeral

home chain and soaked up everything he could learn. He worked and ultimately managed quite a few locations across Houston, living and breathing every moment of his work. He always told us that he knew that this was what he was called to do. We knew he was right. He has a gift for making people smile through their tears and he pours his heart into every family.

When it gets down to it,



planning a funeral requires most of the elements of a wedding, except with only a few days to plan. Dad is relentless about the details. When he gets home from work in the evenings he settles down with a bowl of ice cream in hand, scanning photos or laminating prayer cards or finishing up special touches. People often have no idea what lengths he goes to (which is exactly the way he would want it), but the care that he puts into each service shines through and they respond to that. Through the years he earned every accolade the industry has to offer, but it was never about the awards or the paycheck - it was about his families, and he wanted more for them. So in 2012 when he announced to us that he was going to turn

a condemned house into his very own, fresh kind of funeral home, we jumped on the wagon with him and never looked back.

We knew it would work, we just never knew it would work so fast! (But this is Dad we're talking about so we should have known). In the first year he replaced that crumbling house with a comfortable, peaceful space for families to meet and a modest but beautiful garden. The second year he took the garden concept to amazing heights adding lighted paths, fountains, porch swings, audio/visual throughout the garden, a gazebo, and even a lovely stone outdoor kitchen. He installed a state-of-the-art, in-house crematory (rare for a funeral home) so that your

loved one would never have to leave his care and be shuffled around. He hired a small but talented staff that puts as much heart in as he does.

Families are responding to his vision. Since April 2012, he has already served over 950 families. If you know my Dad, though, you know that he will never stop improving. This year he is building a chapel boasting enormous windows overlooking the service garden. He's adding an antique bell-tower to the gazebo, tripling his office space, and last week I even heard him contemplating a koi pond. There is absolutely no telling what the next project will be, but I know I speak for the whole family when I say that we are delighted to be along for the ride.



**OWNER**  
*John Darst*



## Darst Funeral Home

OPENED DOORS:  
April 10, 2012

FAVORITE QUOTE:  
**I like to say that we bring healing to our community, one family at a time!**