

Scottsdale cryonics facility, the home of Ted Williams' head, hopes frozen dead people will live again

Inside a Scottsdale office building are the heads and bodies of 168 people who have been "cryonically preserved" with the hope that death will not be permanent.

One of the most famous occupants at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation is baseball legend Ted Williams, whose head and body are stored separately inside large cylindrical stainless-steel tanks at the foundation's offices.

Alcor, which began in California in 1972, has operated in Arizona since 1994. The nonprofit company's office houses 168 "patients" and 90 pets (cats, dogs, one turtle and one chinchilla), who have died but are being preserved at subzero temperatures in a way that may allow them to be revived and one day live again, Alcor officials say.

Alcor considers its patients as not dead, but rather in a suspended, in-between state.

The company has 1,250 still-living "members" who have made the legal arrangements and paid up to \$200,000 apiece to reserve a spot in one of Alcor's thermos-like tanks when they die. Each tank is stocked with liquid nitrogen to keep bodies at a temperature of minus 320 degrees Fahrenheit and can hold five heads and four whole bodies.

So far, cryonics has proven far more popular with men than women. About 75 percent of Alcor members and patients are male.

'This is still an experimental process'

Alcor is not a big organization. About eight members die per year, but there have been years when none has died. One of the reasons for its low membership is that Alcor does virtually no marketing. They don't want to mislead the public into thinking that they have a guaranteed ticket to the future after they die, officials said.

"It's an engineering problem, how to make it happen," Alcor co-founder Linda Chamberlain said. "We want people to understand that this is still an experimental process. We don't want anyone to come into this, make arrangements and think this is like going to the hospital and having open-heart surgery, that their chances are just as good. It's not there yet."

When "members" die, they become patients who may choose to remain anonymous. Those non-confidential patients who have waived anonymity may have their photo and name up on the wall inside Alcor's offices, where patients are regarded as people company officials will eventually encounter again.

The photos are a daily reminder to Alcor employees of "why we're here" and "who we're working for," Chamberlain said.

Besides Ted Williams, patients include Dick Clair Jones, who was a writer for CBS-TV's "The Carol Burnett Show" and a co-creator of the NBC-TV situation comedy "The Facts of Life"; American scientist Marvin Minsky, who co-founded the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's artificial intelligence laboratory; and Chinese science fiction writer Du Hong.

Though Alcor prefers that patients die in Scottsdale, they deploy a team anywhere in the world when one of their members dies. The team includes two physicians, a medical response director and Alcor CEO Max More.

They bring with them a folding ice bath and other equipment to the places where members die, and will contract to use an operating room if needed to infuse patients with a chilled organ transplant solution and cryoprotective chemicals.

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