

StardustME offers memorial space flights for the deceased

For the first time, New Zealanders are being offered the opportunity to have ashes from the remains of a loved one launched into space to be carried by a satellite around Earth's orbit.

A company called StardustME, founded by Stu Potter from Te Tairāwhiti Gisborne and Geoff Lamb from Auckland, is offering places on Elon Musk's Space-X rockets, with the first flight being launched from the United States in January.

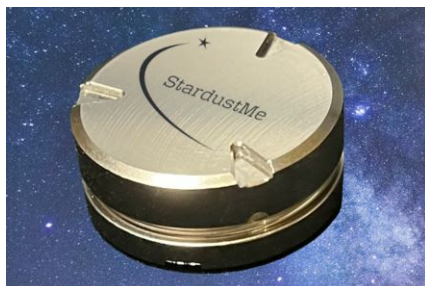
A small amount of ashes are placed into space-engineered StardustME tokens about the size a 50c piece to be hosted on satellites that will orbit Earth for the lifecycle of the satellite which can be up to a decade.



The cost for each memorial flight is just under \$3000 and provides customers choosing cremation a unique way to commemorate loved ones. StardustME aims to change the narrative of losing loved ones, from grief and loss to celebration and tribute.

There is also a looming deadline for booking the January launch, which must be made this month.

Each token can be tracked via third-party satellite tracking apps. Eventually, the token will return to Earth's atmosphere with the satellite, burning up on re-entry and leaving no waste or residual space junk.



As an affiliate member of the New Zealand Funeral Directors Association, StardustME is working with the association's members to offer the unique service to the increasing numbers of Kiwis opting for cremation over burial.

For Stu Potter of Ngāti Awa descent, the first launch will be particularly poignant. It will host the ashes of his cousin, Tristan Stewart, who died last year in Australia during the Covid lockdowns, limiting the ability of whānau to mourn together. “The first flight will honour and celebrate my cousin’s life and remember the amazing person he was,” Stu says. “It is also fortuitous that the launch of StardustME coincides with our nation’s changing attitudes towards how we honour our loved ones who pass, inspired through Matariki.

“At the end of the day we are made up of stardust, as nearly all the elements in the human body were made in a star, which will go on to seed the next generation of stars, hence the name StardustME.”

The idea for the company was originally hatched by Stu, the Managing Director, just over four years ago when the founders were stargazing while camping with their families north of Gisborne, at Anaura Bay. “It was one of those whacky ideas that once verbalised just wouldn’t go away and I knew we had to make it happen,” Stu says.

Aerospace engineering and complicated international compliance protocols had to be navigated and the final challenge for the team was to gain the approval of most Ministerial offices and ultimately signoff from the Economic and Regional Development Minister Stuart Nash, who granted it’s Payload Permit on August 8 this year.

Funeral Directors Association President Rachel Benns says the association is delighted to welcome StardustME as an affiliate. “The reaction from many of our members has been extremely positive,” she says. “While it is likely to be a niche offering initially in terms of memorialisation options, I expect it will have growing appeal reflecting the fascination and connection many people have with space and the technology that is increasing our understanding of the universe.”

For more information the StardustME website is: <https://www.stardustme.com>. Stu Potter can be contacted on 021 908 241.

The Funeral Directors Association of New Zealand chief executive Gillian Boyes is available on 029 200 8985.

Captions: Generic rocket launch from beach in Florida; a StardustME token used to hold cremation ashes.