



# THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

FALL 2019

## Our Treasurer Hopes You'll Treasure Our Cemetery!

We sat down recently with Board of Trustee Treasurer (and previous Chair), John Hoeschele, on the realities of the Cortland Rural Cemetery's finances. And why this vital historic, cultural, and natural resource warrants continued community support.

### **Q: How and why did you get involved with the CRC?**

**A:** Unlike many past and present members of our Board of Trustees, I'm not a Cortland native. Hailing from Rochester, where I used to stroll in Mt. Hope cemetery during lunch breaks, I've just developed an appreciation for local history as a discipline, and cemeteries in particular, over the years. On a whim and as a personal project, I did research and set up a website related to the South Cortland Cemetery across from Wal-Mart a few years back. Having seen that, members of the recently dissolved Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation invited me to join their board to help raise funds and write grants, and it was soon after that that I transplanted to the Trustees/operations side where I could have a more direct impact on operations. I simply knew Cortland Rural needed help, joined the fray, and have been at it for going on 10 years now. I don't have anyone buried here; I just believe it's an important community institution.

### **Q: What do the current finances of the cemetery look like?**

**A:** Our annual operating budget has been hovering around \$130,000-140,000, with the biggest and fastest-rising costs being manpower, insurance, and fuel. On the other side of the ledger, about 40% of our revenue comes from burial fees, plot sales, headstone foundation installations, and other incidentals - and the rest comes from a \$31,500 parking lot lease we have with ASC (Auxiliary Services Corporation) at SUNY Cortland, interest income from two investment accounts, and fundraising efforts like grants and support generated by this newsletter. All that said, after a sort of turnaround in the last few years, things have gotten a bit bleak again in the face of declining burials. Even running as lean as we do, we've been slightly in the red for both 2018 and this year.



CRC TRUSTEE AND TREASURER, JOHN HOESCHELE

### **Q: Can you speak to why that is? Isn't the burial business "always in demand," after all?**

**A:** That may have been true in the mid-20th century, as the CRC interred something close to 150-170 people per year - and cremations, which don't generate as much revenue, were under 5% of burials. These days, if we're lucky, the cemetery inters 40-60 people a year. Of those, only 30-40% are full body burials, while 60-70% are interments of cremation urns. Unfortunately, we see far less revenue for the cremation interments - about 1/3rd to 1/4 of what we do for full body burials - and, worse, cremations have now surpassed full-body interments nationwide and are still rising fast.

### **Q: Didn't people buried years ago pay enough to cover future maintenance of the cemetery?**

**A:** In three words, not even close. While the notion of paying a premium for "perpetual care" was an interesting concept, it wasn't embraced by consumers or many cemeteries like ours. So, the simple truth is people buried from... [CONTINUED ON PAGE 2](#)





**CORTLAND  
RURAL CEMETERY  
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**Students Leave Their Melodic Mark at CRC!  
Cortland High School  
Performs in Our Chapel!**



On two consecutive Saturdays in October, we were excited and honored to have hosted performances by students of Cortland High School, under the direction of Benjamin Wells! Performed in our historic Gibson Memorial Chapel, the first recital featured a

collection of Renaissance-era madrigals - while the second returned to the Renaissance period, with tunes enriched by Mr. Wells accompaniment on his very own harpsichord! Many thanks to Ben, his charming and talented students, and all who attended these lovely Autumn performances... Which demonstrated, once again, what a tremendous and versatile asset the CRC is to the community! 🏰



**Want to  
Continue Our  
Progress?**

*Please consider making a tax deductible gift to the Cortland Rural Cemetery and returning it using the enclosed envelope. Thank you for your support!*



## Our Treasurer Hopes (continued)...

the year of our founding in 1853 until, say, the current decade basically have their plots cared for forever based on whatever one-time fee they paid. Speaking of which, that's why New York State, in the 1940s, mandated that all cemeteries like ours create a "Permanent Maintenance Fund" to cover the cost of maintenance once we're sold out. But even that is a band-aid, as our PMF will be burned up in 20-30 years following our eventual closure due to filled capacity, whenever that will be.

### Q: Can you expand on the nature of that fund and the other investment account you mentioned?

A: The PMF is a State-mandated fund that cannot be accessed for present-day operations: Only its interest can be used for payroll and such. The other account is a donor-advised endowment we assumed when the Cortland Rural Cemetery Foundation elected to dissolve, but here again, the law prevents us from touching the principal.


### Q: What role does the City play in operating the CRC?


A: There's a misconception that we are part of, or funded by, the City of Cortland, the County, or even the State. None of that is true. We're regulated by the State — which brings with it the headaches and burdens of State regulation — but we receive no regular municipal support, except sporadic help from the City, such as removal of some of our green waste. Oh, and we received a used pick-up truck from the Town of Cortlandville a couple years ago.

### Q: You spoke about augmenting revenues with fundraising and grants?

A: Yes, that's been a real focus for us lately. Recent successes included having repaired the slate and copper roof of our cemetery office and Superintendent's house via a \$40,000 capital campaign. We've received three large grants from the JM McDonald Foundation that renovated our office, funded a wheelchair ramp, established two water hydrants, funded our historic trails, among other improvements. We've been blessed by consistent funding from generous individual donors and other granting organizations, like the Ralph R. Wilkins Foundation, CNY Arts, the United Presbyterian Church, among others. And we've received hands-on help from the kind volunteers who come out to help with grounds work on Cemetery Sweep-out Day each spring.

### Q: What can people do to help?

A: When this question comes up, I always point to a quote from an English Prime Minister during the Victorian era, which ironically, is when our cemetery was founded. His name was William Gladstone and he's credited with saying this: *"Show me the manner in which a nation cares for its dead, and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender mercies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land, and their loyalty to high deeds."* I take that to mean that if Cortland wishes to be a first-class community, it should treat the CRC — its largest, oldest, and most historic cemetery — accordingly. Do your part in honoring your forebearers and make a donation. 

  
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in which a nation cares for  
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to high deeds. ..."*

WILLIAM GLADSTONE



## We Can't Say It Enough... Just Gotta Love Our Grounds Crew!

*Sure, during the burial season, our grounds team is charged with mowing our 44 acres the equivalent of 2-3 times a month. But did you know the 4-5 grounds crew staffers also:*

- String-trim around approximately 19,000 gravestones and countless trees
- Pour and install 20-30 custom foundations
- Do excavations for 30-60 cremation-sized and/or full-body interments
- Remove overgrown, unsightly, and often unsafe plantings
- Remove trash, fallen branches, and fallen trees
- Turnkey graveside memorial services (e.g. tent, casket lowering, etc.)
- Back-fill woodchuck holes
- Maintain our equipment
- Maintain our facilities
- Among many other duties

*It's a gargantuan responsibility in which our crew takes a great deal of pride, despite modest pay.*

*PS: You can really help them out by maintaining the graves of your own loved ones, including sweeping off grass our mowers/trimmers may have left behind and keeping your plantings and keep sakes to a minimum.*



# THANK YOU for the thank you's!

Each year, our grounds crew and cemetery supervisor are pleased and motivated to receive thanks you notes from some of our customers - and the 2019 season was no exception. Such kind and thoughtful words mean a lot to us, particularly because they come from people who are going through some of the most difficult times of their lives. Thank you to those who take them time to express appreciation for all our hard-working team members do: We assure you, it means a lot! 🌸



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## CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

### Be an Angel

Learn how your donation or legacy gift can make a difference at the Cortland Rural Cemetery. Contact us to schedule a private consultation and learn about becoming a member of our Angel Society.  
[www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com](http://www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com)

