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Joyce Alexander of Wilmington joins other volunteers and city workers in making Riverview Cemetery presentable for Mother's Day.

Volunteers tidy neglected cemetery

Nonprofit group wants to take over care of Wilmington's Riverview Cemetery

By TERRI SANGINITI
The News Journal

Community volunteers toting weed trimmers and trash bags descended Saturday morning upon Riverview Cemetery to groom the final resting place of their loved ones for Mother's Day.

Last year at this time, the cemetery at 33rd and North Market streets was knee-high in overgrown weeds just as families were poised to visit their relatives' graves. This year, it's a different story.

The cemetery has been given some loving care, thanks to the members of the fledgling Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery, who have pitched in to ensure that past situation doesn't repeat itself.

Last month, the Delaware Center for Horticulture organized an Arbor Day event at the 87-acre cemetery, cutting

through dead tree limbs and wood-chipping fallen branches on the cemetery's west side.

Wilmington Communications Director John Rago said Mayor James Baker also has reached out and authorized workers from the city's Department of Parks and Recreation to aid the volunteers with grass cutting.

"The mayor's concern was that the facility looks as nice as it could for Mother's Day," Rago said. "This is a one-time-only maintenance. The city is not in any position beyond that to commit to any regular cleanup of the cemetery."

Last year, the city pitched in \$13,900 to have the grass cut twice over the summer.

Since 2003, the cemetery has been owned by the Rev. Tom Davis, pastor of Restoration Christian Fellowship Church at 13 E. 35th St.

"There's a certain amount of responsibility on the part of the entity that currently owns this property," Rago said. "They have responsibility to the families and responsibilities to the city in terms that this is a large tract of land that cannot be an eyesore. It's part of the landscape of the city and the city's history."

Steering committee member Lee Anderson of the The Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery said members are still engaged in dialogue with state and city officials to see what can be done to have the grounds maintained.

The nonprofit organization is negotiating with Riverview's owner to see if the cemetery can be turned over to the volunteer group to run, Anderson said.

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