

All spruced up for free

Dozens donate time, equipment at Riverview Cemetery

By TERRI SANGINITI
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The grounds of Riverview Cemetery were abuzz Wednesday morning with sounds of saws and chippers as a team of nearly three dozen arborists cut their way through tree limbs and felled dangerous trees.

It all was part of an Arbor Day project aimed at revitalizing the sprawling cemetery in Wilmington's northeast section.

The cost for the day of work, if not performed by volunteers, would have been more than \$10,000, said Gary Schwetz, director of programs for the Delaware Center for Horticulture, which organized the community event.

The center recruited 15 local tree care and related company volunteers to lend their equipment and time to the project at the 87-acre cemetery that spans the east and west side of North Market Street between 31st and 33rd streets.

The revitalization project was a long time coming for the families with relatives buried in the cemetery.

In the past decade, its longtime



Workers from 10 tree-care companies were among the dozens of volunteers who turned out to help the Friends of Riverview Cemetery.

owner went bankrupt, and that was followed by a new owner who allowed the cemetery to fall into disrepair. Family members trimmed the weeds around loved ones' graves.

"I tried for years to get something done about the dead trees," said Carol Horsey, whose parents, husband, and sister are buried there. "Every time I would come in here, I would see more trees with broken limbs and limbs falling

down on the tombstones."

Horsey turned to her longtime tree trimmer, John Kerns, of Kerns Brothers, and asked him if there was anything he could do to help.

"I figured that all I have to do is ask him," she said. "The worst he could do was to say no."

Kerns came through for her and the rest of the Friends of Riverview Cemetery.

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According to Schwetz, Kerns prodded tree program manager Patrice Sheehan, who floated the idea to the staff as a volunteer Arbor Day project.

"We thought it was a great idea," he said.

Sheehan, a certified arborist, and Kerns visited the cemetery prior to the event and spent four hours evaluating the trees, identifying 32 as dead or dangerous, Schwetz said.

The volunteer tree trimmers started rolling their equipment into the cemetery about 7:15 a.m., bringing in cranes, aerial trucks, tractors, chippers and about 30 workers to prune trees felled by storms and remove dead and decaying trees posing a danger.

Participants included Kerns Brothers, Rickerman Tree Service, All Seasons, Arborists Associates, Asplundh, Bartlett Tree Experts, Beaver Creek Tree Service, Bob's Crane, Brandywine Tree & Shrub, Davey Tree, Delmarva Power, DiSabatino's and Leo Friel & Sons.

Copeland's Mulch Depot and Holland Mulch provided workers with a free place to dispose of all the residue, said Wendy Scott, spokesperson for the horticulture center.

Scott said the organization sought permission to be on the property from cemetery owner the Rev. Tom Davis, who heads Restoration Christiana Fellowship Church.

Horsey said he was delighted about all the activity. "This is a big project. It's been a long time

coming."

There also was an unexpected discovery.

After sawing down the stump of a tall Linden tree, tree climber Luiz Burgos of Kern Brothers discovered four newborn kittens nestled inside the mulch.

"When I dropped the log, they came along for a free ride," Burgos said with a laugh. "Apparently, it used to be somebody's apartment."

Author Lee Anderson, who helped organize the nonprofit Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery, said she hopes this renewed interest in the grounds will open a new chapter for the cemetery.

Her group provided water, coffee and doughnuts for the volunteers.

"It's a much-loved cemetery," Anderson said. "What is evident here from the generosity of the Delaware Center for Horticulture is that when you collaborate with one another, you start to make progress and everyone feels good."

In the past two years, the horticulture center has planted trees and flowering bulbs in other areas of the city to revitalize distressed streets and parks.

Wednesday's volunteer cemetery project, concentrated on the west side of the 87-acre cemetery, only partially completed the work needed.

"We're going to make a big dent in it today," Schwetz said. "I think we'll have some leftover for next Arbor Day, too."

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