

Remarks made by Cortland Rural Cemetery Board of Trustees President, John Hoeschele, at May 7th 2015 ‘ribbon cutting’ ceremony that officially introduced the CRC’s cemetrail” and arboretum:

“It’s probably no secret to anyone in Cortland that this cemetery – like hundreds across the NYS and thousands nationwide – has seen better days. While the reasons for the challenges we face are many and complicated, suffice it to say that roughly two years ago, the Board of Trustees elected to try and change our downward trajectory – by putting in place and executing a strategic vision. The main idea of this vision this: In order for the cemetery to thrive and not become a burden on the community, it must move beyond providing a place to memorialize our dead – to providing value and relevance to the living. By repositioning the cemetery as an asset for both constituencies – the living and the dead – we not only provide the public with an opportunity and rationale for providing much-needed financial support, we actually reconnect the cemetery to its heritage as a rural cemetery – as a place specifically designed to enable the living to memorialize their deceased loved ones in the context of beautiful, garden-like setting that celebrates natural beauty and reminds us of our place in the universe.

Today – with the opening of our ‘cemetrail’ and ‘arboretum’ -- we mark an important milestone on the long journey of realizing the Board’s vision and, hopefully, returning the cemetery to better days.

What is a cemetrail? Whether I was successful or not, I confess to coining the term a year ago to help people easily understand the concept of a walking trail located within a cemetery. Our particular cemetrail deliberately winds through our 44 acre grounds, affording the walker or hiker a total of 20 interpretive signs

along the way...each one offering educational content that effectively adds information to exercise. Today, I'll walk you through the first tour-stops – after which you can complete the trail on your own. Or return to do so another day.

Our arboretum, on the other hand, features 30 distinct and noteworthy species – including, I am proud to announce, 2 NYS champions as confirmed just last week by the Department of Environmental Conservation. It is our goal, over the coming years, to increase that count to over 100 species – most likely native varieties – and achieve, as resources allow, all of the characteristics of a world-class arboretum... including ongoing public education, collaborations with other arboreta, proactive planning, and tree conservation.

Of course, we have several folks to thank for the progress we'll show you today.

First and foremost, the Cemetery Board, staff, and Cortland community owe a debt of gratitude to the J.M. McDonald Foundation for their \$30,000 grant toward this stage of our journey -- which we've dubbed "Operation Greenspace!" Without the support of the McDonald Foundation, literally none of this would have been possible. So we thank Don McJunkin and his fellow Board members for recognizing the importance of this cemetery in the Cortland community, for understanding the magnitude of the challenges we face as a cemetery, and for having faith in the Board's corrective plan and vision.

Beyond the financial support of the McDonald Foundation, we also have our neighbor to the north – SUNY Cortland -- to thank for its assistance, energy, and expertise in this project. Specifically, we would like to thank the following team members for their roles in the project:

- **Sophie Louise Jackson**, a student under the direction of Tim Conner in the Geology department, for researching and authoring the ‘geology’ stories you will see on each of our 20 trail signs.
- **Denise Seidler**, a student under the direction of Professor Kathy Kramer in the art and art-history department, for developing the ‘art stories’ that seek to give visitors a new appreciation for the artistic and aesthetic assets found throughout our cemetery.
- **Mason Young**, a student under the direction of Associate Professor Wendy Miller from the Geography department, for developing the comprehensive map trail on our new kiosk and the paper maps folks will use on their self-guided tours.
- And, also, **Dr. Steven Broyles**, chair of Biological Sciences Department, who tirelessly surveyed our cemetery grounds – counting, identifying, and cataloging over 300 trees...30 of them noteworthy enough to qualify for a place in our new arboretum.

And who has generously agreed to advise us, hereafter, on enhancing and expanding our arboretum and implementing best practices.

Outside of the college community, I would also like to thank a good friend of the Cemetery and one-time Board member, Christine Buck, who developed and wrote our original self-guided tour – which formed the basis and structure of today’s new interpretive signs.

And last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to our own cemetery staff – for all of their hard work installing our new 20 interpretive signs, our map kiosk, and over 60 new section signs also funded by the McDonald grant to help orient visitors.”

At this point in the proceedings, Hoeschele turned the lectern over to SUNY Cortland's President, Dr. Erik Bitterbaum, student collaborator Sophie Louise Jackson, and City of Cortland Mayor Brian Tobin for their perspectives on the project – after which attendees embarked upon a partial tour of the cemetery.