

Inmates clean up cemetery

State senator lends his support to site's families

By **TERRI SANGINITI**
Staff reporter

The state Department of Correction has committed to another season of grass cutting at Riverview Cemetery, state officials said.

Last week, officials said they had no plans to supply the manpower needed to maintain the abandoned property. But state Sen. Harris B. McDowell III, D-Wilmington North, apparently persuaded the state to continue cleanup efforts at the 130-year-old cemetery.

Cemetery activist Grace Duffy said she was grateful for the swift action.

"Sen. McDowell stepped forward once again to aid the families at Riverview, as he has consistently done in the past," Duffy said. "These families deserve this after all they've been through."

Tuesday morning, six inmates in blue jumpsuits from the Sussex Violation of Probation Center were busy tackling about 8 inches of overgrown grass and weeds at the



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Paul Starkey, 58, of Sussex Violation of Probation Center, mows grass Wednesday at Riverview Cemetery in Wilmington, where Starkey's parents are buried. At right is Terrence Hitchens, 38.

87-acre cemetery, at 33rd and North Market streets.

Two of the inmates assigned to work had relatives buried in the cemetery, he said.

"We'd like to get it all done in time for Mother's Day," said state Department of Correction Sgt. Darrell Hastings, who was overseeing the work.

Owners of the nonprofit cemetery — the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodges 1 and 34 and the Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge — filed for bankruptcy last June. A federal bankruptcy judge declared the uninsured property abandoned in February.

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Previous articles about the cemetery.

Prisoners being held on technical or probation violations spruced up the cemetery grounds last summer.

McDowell acknowledged Tuesday that he spoke with correction officials and struck a deal so visitors with family members buried there would be able to place flowers on well-maintained graves for Mother's Day.

"I made sure they'd show

up and have the wherewithal to do the job," McDowell said. He would not discuss specifics.

But Sussex Community Center Capt. Bill Oettel said he could use some new equipment to get the job done.

Oettel doubts that the seven push mowers he has available are adequate.

"I'd be tickled to death to have some new equipment," Oettel said. "When we run out of push mowers, I guess it's going to come down to sickles."

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