



TERRI SANGINITI/THE NEWS JOURNAL

Three companies donated services Monday to repair some tombstones damaged by vandals in July at Riverview Cemetery.

# Companies help restore damaged headstones

By Terri Sanginiti  
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Jim Wrightson and his cousin Carol Knight stood in the grass at Riverview Cemetery next to a shady tree Monday and watched as four workers from two memorial companies tried to hoist their grandparents' huge marble gravestone back on its base.

The tombstone for John Mason, who died in 1962, and his wife Mary, who followed him in 1983, was knocked over July 16 by vandals who toppled a total of 75 monuments, including 10 large obelisks — causing an estimated \$20,000 in damages.

No arrests have been made.

Along with his grandparents' stone, the vandals also toppled the stone of Wrightson's parents, Robert and Helen. Their stone is situated to the right of his grandparents' final resting place.

Three area monument companies — Abba Monument Company of Newark, Cecil Vault & Memorial Company in Milltown and John W. Pauley Memorials in Wilmington — volunteered Monday to restore some of the vandalized monuments, said

Lee Anderson, president of the Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery, which oversees operations at the cemetery.

The crew working in the front A Section of the cemetery had a problem trying to upright the two memorials for Wrightson's relatives. An immense tree had grown up next to the Masons' plot, and tree limbs first needed to be cut away before the hoisting truck could work there unimpeded.

It took workers about three hours to get the two stones up and in place.

Wrightson, of Brack-Ex near Elsmere, recalled how his grandfather owned the 35th Street Cafe on Market Street and died when he was only about 60 years old. After his death, his grandmother used to walk from their home at 37th and Spruce streets to the cemetery every day and would sit for hours by her husband's grave.

According to family members, she is the one who planted the young tree back in the '60s. Since then, Wrightson said he's taken pictures over the years that illustrate the tree's growth.

Working in Section B along with some Friends

volunteers was Dan Cecil, of Cecil Vault and Memorial.

"He's a perfectionist," Anderson said of Dan Cecil. "What he does is an art. It really is."

Cecil taught the six cemetery board members how to smooth out the area where the stone had been separated from the base and how to roll the compound around the perimeter to seal the two pieces together.

Eleven gravestones in a row had been knocked over in Section B near the public mausoleum.

Anderson said she counted 14 stones down in Section A, 11 down in Section B and 31 gravestones, including the obelisks, in Section D.

From the markers that were face-up, Anderson said she compiled a list, researched the owners and then mailed out about 12 letters to the families on record.

"Only about four or five of them got back to us," she said, adding that some of the stones date back to the early 1900s. "Some of the letters we sent came back as 'undeliverable.'"

Since the three memorial companies are only donating their time for

one day, Anderson said she has to find another way to fund the repairs.

Two years ago, cemetery officials received a \$10,000 grant for the Distressed Cemetery Fund to make repairs to the gravestones on the original part of the cemetery on the east side of Market Street.

"We'll be able to apply again for a grant in 2015, or the monument companies might donate another day of service," Anderson said.

Wrightson said if they catch the vandals who did this, they should be made to repair the damage they caused.

"Maybe they'll think twice before doing something so destructive," he said.

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