



The News Journal/FRED COMEGYS

Chad Armstrong works for the company contracted to cut the grass at Riverview Cemetery. He expects to be on the job through Friday.

## Overdue cleanup at cemetery begins

By **TERRI SANGINITI**  
Staff reporter

Using lawn mowers, trimmers and plenty of orange trash bags, nearly 50 state inmates got an early start Tuesday tackling the tombstone-high weeds covering Riverview Cemetery.

The cleanup at the overgrown 87-acre cemetery was spearheaded by state Sen. Harris B. McDowell III, D-Wilmington North. The work is expected to take about 12 days.

In recent months, McDowell collaborated with the Wilmington legislative delegation, the governor's office, Wilmington's mayor and City Council members, and state prison officials to devise an interim plan to provide some "temporary maintenance" of the cemetery.

For more articles on the Riverview Cemetery, go to



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State law had to be changed to do that, McDowell said.

The cemetery is private property, so the officials had no authority to go in and clean it up.

"We originally thought we could just do it," McDowell said. "Then we realized it needed new language written."

A paragraph was added to the state bond bill approved Saturday by the General Assembly allowing the prison commissioner to direct offenders to assist with community-restoration projects.



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Tomiko Jacobs, an inmate from Sussex County, cleans up Tuesday. "I'm allergic to grass," she said, "but I like being out."

"Once the language was in there, that gave us the ability to put this plan in motion and get it done," McDowell said.

The State Department of Correction provided 46 prisoners being held on technical or proba-

tion violations for labor. Thirty of the inmates were from the Sussex Violation of Probation Center; six from Central Violation of Probation Center and 10 from the Plummer Community

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## Cemetery: Cleanup just a temporary fix

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Correction Center, said Noreen Renard, chief of community corrections.

Wilmington Mayor James M. Baker hired Priority Services of Newark, a professional mowing service, to trim and mow the grounds closest to the headstones, monuments and mausoleums.

"We do have people that we're ready to put under contract to keep it down so it doesn't get out of hand," Baker said at a news conference Tuesday. "Usually it takes a crisis to get people together, but sometimes that's what it is."

McDowell emphasized that the cleanup was only a temporary measure for the cemetery.

Earlier this year, the state Attorney General's Office charged the cemetery's owners with consumer fraud. A hearing is scheduled July 23 in Chancery Court to place the cemetery in receivership.

On June 4, cemetery operators Delaware Lodge No. 1 and

Eden Lodge No. 34 of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge in Pennsylvania filed for bankruptcy because they no longer could "sustain viable operations."

Members of the cemetery's ground maintenance crew were laid off April 20 when the cemetery ran out of money to pay them.

In the interim, scores of family volunteers, as well as volunteers from MBNA and the U.S. Postal Service, and City Councilman Charles Potter Jr., have tried to maintain the grounds. But the cemetery's size has overwhelmed volunteer efforts.

As she took a break Tuesday, Sussex center inmate Joanne Triplett said helping spruce up the cemetery gave her a sense of pride.

"This is my community, and it's important that I can do something positive," said Triplett, whose father, cousin and best friend are buried there.

Next Wednesday, Potter will hold a community meeting at 7

p.m. in the cafeteria of the P.S. du Pont Elementary School to update the community on the progress of the cemetery maintenance and the lawsuit.

For the past two years, Carl and Maureen Kyles have spent 15 hours a week mowing the grounds in sections where their relatives and former neighbors are buried.

The cemetery is a jungle, the 67-year-old Devonshire man said Tuesday. "It's a good thing they started something."

A small group of bystanders — all with relatives buried in the cemetery — watched as the inmates worked their way east toward Market Street from Washington Street.

Herb Keene, 91, whose wife, Mary, was disinterred from the cemetery in November, said Riverview "had once been a place of pride."

Keene's daughter, Mary Lou Erdman, said her father no longer wanted to be buried in the cemetery, so the family paid \$5,000 to move her mother's remains to White Clay Creek

Church Cemetery.

"If they could do this today, why couldn't they have done it before?" Erdman said.

Cemetery activist Grace Duffy, who was the catalyst behind McDowell's involvement, said the cooperative effort was long overdue.

"I don't know why the cemetery didn't reach out long ago and organize this," Duffy said. "Why did it take ordinary citizens to do it?"

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