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Lee Anderson (right) and Kate Wilhere, officers of the nonprofit Friends of the Historic Riverview Cemetery, inspect water damage to the Wilmington cemetery's chapel Friday after taking title to the property from the city pastor who has operated it since 2003.

# Future looking brighter for Riverview cemetery

By TERRI SANGINITI  
 The News Journal

Riverview Gardens cemetery has seen its share of woes in the past 10 years.

It has been rife with complaints of poor maintenance, misplaced graves, lost remains, a stolen skull and mismanagement of its perpetual-care fund. It has faced state investigations and was the target of metal thieves who swiped the heavy brass doors off mausoleums.

The Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery, a nonprofit group of volunteers incorporated in April, hopes it can help the cemetery turn the corner on its troubles now that it has taken over ownership.

On Friday morning, the Rev. Tom C. Davis deeded over the 136-year-old graveyard, originally known as Riverview Cemetery, to the volunteer group, which in recent years has tried to keep it spruced up.

It is the second time in eight years that the Wilmington cemetery has changed owners.

"It's been quite a journey," said Lee Anderson, who heads the group and is the author of a 2005 book about the cemetery, "Reading the Stones: A Collection of Memories from the

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 of Historic Riverview Cemetery

First State."

"I hope we can now move forward," she said.

The cemetery is divided into two parcels totaling 39 acres, according to county records.

One section, bounded by Market and Washington streets between 31st and 33rd streets, spans 18 acres. A second, 21-acre parcel on the east side of Market Street stretches to Thatcher Street and is bounded by Eastlawn Avenue and Todds Lane.

On Friday, the group got custody of the key to the cemetery's long-closed chapel, along with a \$1,287.95 bank balance, a \$350 check from a recent burial, an insurance claim for the stolen mausoleum doors, a 1998 basket truck and a 1988 dump truck — neither of which had keys — and legal fees for the settlement.

They also assumed Davis' unpaid tax debt of \$70,440.

Davis, pastor of Restoration Christian Fellowship Church at 12 E. 35th St., was deeded the cemetery in 2003 for \$1 from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Grand Lodge, Lodges No. 1 and No. 34, and the Knights of Pythias Lodge of Pennsylvania.

As part of the takeover, Davis received a collective \$150,000 from the three groups, who filed for bankruptcy after abandoning the property in 2001.

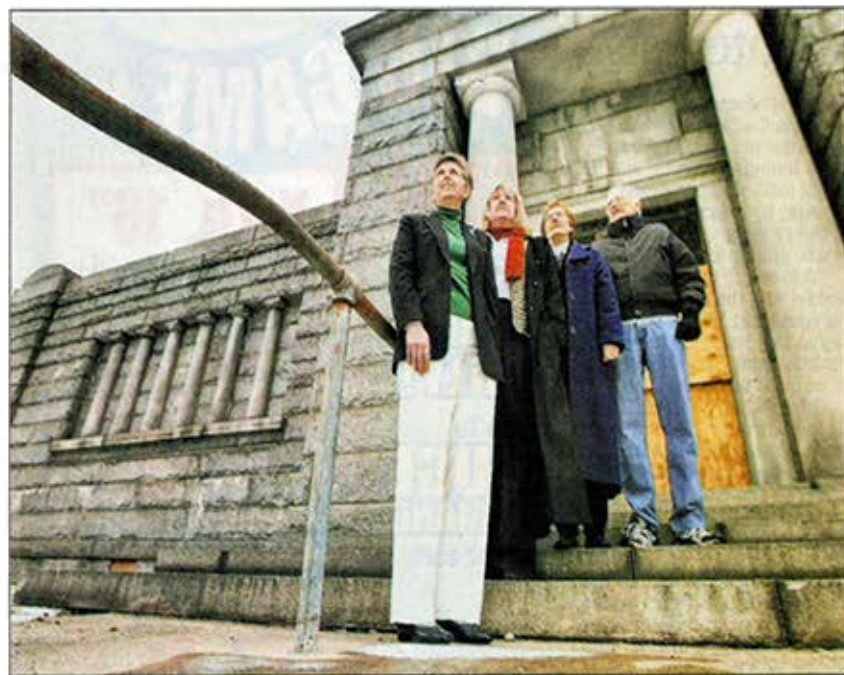
By that point, the cemetery was already run-down. There were no perpetual-care funds and record-keeping was so poor, lawsuits were filed over several misplaced graves.

Anderson said the cemetery has had 182 burials in the years since Davis took over.

For families with loved ones buried there, Friday's transfer of ownership was a positive step.

"Good riddance," said Grace Duffy, an early cemetery activist. "At least they are really rid of him and got Davis out of there. It will be interesting to see what goes on from here. But it should be better, because it can't get any worse."

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Leaders of the Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery stand in front of the public mausoleum at the 136-year-old Wilmington graveyard Friday. From left: Lee Anderson, president; Kate Wilhere, treasurer; Cheryl S. Markiewicz, vice president; and board member Tedd Cocker will now help operate, maintain and restore the operation.

# Riverview: Volunteers say they're ready to move forward

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Carol Horsey, who has family members buried there, said she was "tickled to death" that Davis was finally out of the picture.

Some, though, have expressed doubts the nonprofit can run a cemetery.

Paul Cathell, founder and president of the Delaware Medal of Honor Historical Association, said he would prefer that the city or state take it over.

"I'm happy for them if they want to be owners and wish them good luck," he said. "We'll see what happens in the next 10 years."

Davis acknowledged some of the problems Friday.

"I'm hoping the future of Riverview should be what it should have been," he said. "It's been a very arduous project. It is great to have a group that seemingly has a good support system in place to take on the project."

Anderson said her group has taken steps to improve communication by posting signs listing a new telephone number that volunteers will answer.

She also wants to nominate Riverview to the National Register of Historic Places. She has scheduled a tree-planting event



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## ONLINE EXTRA

Watch video from the cemetery and hear comments from a board member at [www.delawareonline.com](http://www.delawareonline.com).

Riverview.

Retired Wilmington police Sgt. Tom Monaghan said at least two officers killed in the line of duty in the early 20th century are interred in Riverview.

"It has a lot of value to the community and to the city," he said.

A building committee has been formed to make renovations to the water-damaged chapel and to repair the public mausoleum, whose 1,000-pound brass doors were stolen by metal thieves in July.

"The chapel's a wreck, but at least we could go in there," said the group's treasurer, Kate Wilhere. "The paint is peeling, the carpet is moldy and it smelled really bad. But we found plot plans in there that had not been damaged by water. Now, we feel like we can move forward."

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for March 21, funded by a grant from the Delaware Forest Service, and a Memorial Day service May 30 to remember the nearly 800 veterans interred in the cemetery.

In addition, volunteer Richard Sutor is computerizing all cemetery records dating to 1873.

The nonprofit relies heavily on partnerships with the Plummer Center, Benchmark Builders, the city of Wilmington, military veterans and retired police officers, who have many fellow officers buried in