

The WCCA Reporter

A Wisconsin Cemetery & Cremation Association Publication



The President's Point

Happy Holidays!

Hope you had a great fall. It is my favorite time of year from a personal point. From the work side, it is a time of hoping the weather is kind to us. Trying to get the leaves taken care and not have too much rain. Always a challenge but we seem to make it through each year.

Other challenges for our cemetery this fall is working with the city on a major easement through a portion of the cemetery. They want to run a storm water sewer below surface and want to tunnel the storm water pipe. This creates a challenge of how will this affect us in the future. In that a cemetery's commodity is space I do not want to give up space for an easement. On the other hand, they are going under an area where we currently have a road. They will replace this road with a brand new road after construction.

In this type of project there are many considerations to weigh. Working relationship with the city; future land use; new road at no cost; should there be compensation. This project is like many that we face working with a cemetery. The hardest part with our current decision is how it will affect us in the future.

Cemeteries cannot say, "Don't worry about that, things will all change in a number of years and they can worry about it then". We must be fortune tellers and prognosticators for future events. Because a cemetery is a cemetery is a cemetery. And what we do today will affect the future of the cemetery.

Many cemeteries have most of their sections laid out for traditional burial and along comes cremation. Most cremations only need half the lot of a traditional lot. So, does one now cut the lots in half? How do we label the new lot? How do we show that on the map? What should we charge for that lot?

As we make these space adjustments we must keep in mind future revenues. If you cut your price in half for a cremation lot you are cutting your revenue in half as well. You will then be struggling to raise your prices in the future. You must consider charging a similar price for your cremation lots as you do for traditional spaces.

Do not think of the size of the lot, think of the number of services you continue to provide for each customer no matter the size of the lot. You still have to provide a workforce; maintain the lawn and roads; report and maintain records; purchase and maintain equipment; worker's compensation insurance; city assessments (storm water runoff); utility bills; repair bills; and the list goes on. It is your responsibility to generate

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Bill Hoffmann

Graceland Cemetery

enough revenue to run your cemetery today and provide for the future.

As cemeteries continue to have new challenges, we must deal with them head on today. Our actions of today must keep the future in mind. Planning for the future of a cemetery is a huge responsibility that we are charged with. A cemetery is a cemetery is a cemetery. As you plan things today, make sure you plan for the future.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays,
Frank

WCCA Meeting of the Board...

11/29/2017 Portage, WI. The WCCA board met today to discuss a variety of topic, with the primary subject being the planning for the statewide conference in June of 2018. Present at the meeting were President Frank Groh, Secretary Jim Gallagher, Treasurer Brian Dresang and Directors Glen Porter, Regan Barth, Mary Breivogel, and Krista Schneider.

It has been decided that the upcoming conference dates will be June 13, 14, 15 so save the dates on your calendar. The location will be in Green Bay. The site of the meeting will the Comfort Suites located at 1951 Bond Street, in Green Bay. The location is fairly near to Lambeau Field, and the new Titledown District, with exciting new shops and restaurants. The reports that were given regarding the hotel were that the customer service was superior and top notch and as good as any much higher priced hotel. The Hotel has an indoor water park, and excellent dining and bar facilities. All the rooms will be going through a major renovation this spring, so everything inside will be new.

The format of the conference will be very similar to past conferences, including a golf outing and the cemetery 101 program, which will be updated and offer new materials. The speaker schedule is still being worked on and is not set in stone as of yet, but I'm sure we will have much more information on that in our next newsletter. Also discussed, was the likelihood of the 2019 conference being in the Milwaukee area. Nothing concrete on that at this point in time.

Glen Porter gave a legislative report, and as part of the report he opined that very little was being accomplished legislatively due to contentiousness in the legislature. There were a few items that were being discussed legislatively including how the

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Save the Dates!

2018 WCCA Conference, June 13, 14, 15

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state prisons handle the bodies of prisoners who die while incarcerated, a bill to change the definition of a wetland, and the desire to have more clarification on the new cemetery inheritance law.

Finally the last topics discussed had to do with the association's finances and the age old issue of how to increase membership.

-Bill Hoffmann

It's the Law

By Frank Groh

"No cemetery may be used for burials....."

Yes, this is what the law says. And then it says, ".....except for the following:"

So is there a cemetery that cannot be used for burial?

Well, legally what is the definition of a cemetery? WI ss **157.061(1p)** "Cemetery" means any land, including any mausoleum on the land, that is used or intended to be used, exclusively for the burial of human remains.

157.065 Location and ownership of cemeteries

(1) No cemetery may be used for burials except any of the following:

(a) A cemetery in use on April 4, 1864.

(b) A cemetery organized and operated by any of the following:

1. A municipality.
2. A religious association.
3. A fraternal or benevolent society.
4. An incorporated college of a religious order.

5. A cemetery association created under s. 157.062.

6. A corporation organized under ch. 180 or 181.



7. A limited liability company organized under ch. 183.

If we go back to the definition of cemetery, I can bury old granny in the backyard and I have a cemetery, right? Read the definition of cemetery, any land exclusively for the burial of human remains. And once granny is there I am not going to use the land for anything else! So I have a cemetery, right? Wrong!

No, you are not a cemetery under any of the qualifiers, you do not meet any of the criteria under ss 157.065(1). Furthermore, there are other provisions under 157.065(2) to be aware of. Ss 157.061(1p) is only a definition of the word cemetery as it is used in the statutes.

My point to this article is that you must read the statute and the entire statute before making an interpretation of the law. You cannot pick and choose sentences from the law, you must read it in its entirety and in context. And then read it 4-5 more times in trying to understand it. (I wish they had pictures.)

As my good friend E. Glen Porter III said, "They have to start somewhere when they initially write a law." When they wrote this law they were covering anything that could be considered a cemetery and saying, ok, **now**, this is what we are going to call a cemetery; these are the parameters we are going to use. There may be some other exceptions out there but we are not aware of them and we will add it later if we have to; for now this is what a cemetery is.

Also, what is the intent of the statute as it is written. You must consider why the statute was written. This may be a little more difficult to determine. You may have to do research as to the formation of the bill before it became law.

As you try to follow the law, try to educate yourself as much as possible. Don't just read it the way you want it to read.

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Try reading it a loud. Read the statutes and remember there may be statutes in other sections that may relate to the law you are researching. Talk to other association members and you will be surprised how much knowledge is out there among the members. We are all in this together.

This is only an opinion. Contact an attorney for legal advice when needed.



WCCA Quarterly Newsletter November 2017

WCCA Participates in Legislative Roundtable on Occupational Licensing

On November 21, Erik Kanter from Hoven Consulting, participated in legislative roundtable on professional licensing requirements. The meeting was hosted by the State Assembly Democratic Caucus in response to recent attempts by Governor Scott Walker and legislative Republicans to aimed at studying and eliminating certain occupational license.

WCCA was one of many groups in a coalition invited to the roundtable. Other groups included dietitians, plumbers, dental hygienists, and cosmetologists. The coalition has been working together for a number of months to oppose a bill introduced by Senator Chris Kapenga and Representative Rob Hutton that creates an Occupational License Review Council to review every occupational license currently required in the state.

Assembly Democrats invited the coalition in order to better understand the opposition to the bill. In a constructive discussion lasting over 2 hours, each member of the coalition educated legislators on how licensure protects consumers and why it's necessary for each respective industry.

Kanter expressed WCCA's support for current licensure requirements, and emphasized just how important it is for the state Cemetery Board to know exactly who is providing cemetery services and managing cemetery trusts. Kanter said professional misconduct is rare in the industry, but when problems do arise, they are swiftly dealt with because of licensure requirements and the oversight of the state Cemetery Board.

Assembly Democrats appreciated the input provided by the coalition and expressed their desire to be helpful in defeating the legislation. The legislators suggested efforts to increase public awareness of the bill by drafting op-eds and letters to the editor.

At this time, the bill has not passed either house of the legislature, nor has it been scheduled for a vote. WCCA continues to monitor the bill and remain active in opposing the measure.

Harsdorf Appointed to DATCP Secretary

On Friday, November 10, Governor Scott Walker announced his appointed of Sheila Harsdorf (R - River Falls) as Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP). She begins her new role today.

A longtime legislator, Harsdorf served in the State Assembly from 1989 - 1999 before being elected to represent the 10th district in the State Senate in 2000. Harsdorf brings a wealth of experience to her new appointment having served in the Senate for seventeen years where she



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spearheaded a number of initiatives related to agriculture. She also served on the budget-writing Joint Committee on Finance for several sessions.

In a statement, Harsdorf said, "I'm excited to work with and support our farmers, businesses, and consumers to promote a fair marketplace and economic growth in Wisconsin's vibrant agriculture industry."

Walker announced a special election to fill the vacant senate seat on January 16 and, if necessary, a primary on December 19. Representatives Adam Jarchow (R - Balsam Lake) and Shannon Zimmerman (R - River Falls) will face off in a Republican primary.

Walker also announced special elections in the 58th and 66th Assembly Districts. The 58th is vacant following the death of former Representative Bob Gannon, and the 66th will be vacant following Representative Cary Mason's resignation to serve as Mayor of Racine. Both elections will also be held on January 16 with primaries on December 19 if necessary.

Walker Announces Reelection Campaign
After months of speculation and hints that a reelection bid was inevitable, Governor **Scott Walker officially announced he's seek** a third term as Wisconsin Governor.

Walker made the announcement at a rally in Waukesha on November 5. While speaking on some of his recent **accomplishments, Walker said. "We're not satisfied with just where we're at. We're moving forward because there's more to be done."**

Laying out his goals for another term, he stated his intentions to provide tax cuts. **During the speech, he said, "We want a state where we household income going up, not just through more jobs and higher**

wages and greater prosperity, but where **we let you keep more of your money."**

This will mark Walker's fourth campaign as the Republican nominee. He's won both reelection and a recall challenge during his first term.

It's unclear who Walker will face in a general election. A number of Democrats announced their campaigns. While **there's no clear frontrunner at this time,** it seems four candidates have risen to the top of the pack.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tony Evers is currently the only Democratic candidate to win statewide election. He was first elected to **state superintendent in 2009. He's been** reelected two more times since then. He previously served as Deputy Superintendent from 2001-09. **He's also** been a high school principal and district superintendent.

State Senator Kathleen Vinehout has represented parts of Jackson, Trempealeau, Buffalo, Pepin, Pierce, and Eau Claire counties in the State Senate **since 2007. She's also an organic** farmer. During her tenure in the legislature, Vinehout has taken interest on a wide range of issues relating to agriculture, rural areas, the environment, and public benefits.

State Representative Dana Wachs announced his candidacy in early August. Wachs has represented Eau Claire in the State Assembly since 2012. He is currently the ranking Democratic member on the Assembly Judiciary Committee. In addition to his service in the state legislature, Wachs is a trial attorney in the Eau Claire area.

Andy Gronik, a Milwaukee-area based business owner, announced in July he will run as a Democratic candidate for governor in 2018. A political-unknown, he owned and operated the business-consulting firm AccuVal from 1988 to 2013.

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WAFP's legislative committee and government affairs team is closely monitoring the 2018 election season and will provide updates as the campaigns progress



Balloons in the Cemetery, fitting tribute, or damaging décor? - by Bill Hoffmann

Balloon Releases seem to be a popular add-on for funeral homes. And from their perspective, I can understand it. It is relatively low cost and if done properly, can be a strong symbolic experience for families. How many times have I watched this play out at Graceland Cemetery? Hundreds... thousands?? The family all gathered around the grave during the committal service, and then just as the service ends one of the funeral home staff shows up with a large bundle of helium filled balloons. They pass the balloons to all, talk about the symbolism of the deceased's spirit rising up to heaven, and how they call all watch the balloons as a symbol of this rising... on the count of three, one... two... three... **RELEASE!!** (...and I hear my grounds superintendent grumble in the distance.)

You see, from his perspective, there is nothing good about a balloon release. He sees far too often how the balloons get caught in the trees and become an eyesore. They also pose a threat to wild life. Some animals may try to eat the balloons once they have deflated. Other animals may just get tangled up in them. According to the non-profit organization, **"Balloons Blow, Don't Let Them Go!"** "All released balloons, including those falsely marketed as "biodegradable latex," return to Earth as ugly litter. They kill countless animals and cause dangerous power outages.



The above was taken at Graceland Cemetery recently after a balloon release. No... this is not some kind of plumb tree.

What do you think? Does your cemetery have a policy regarding balloon releases? Let us know! You can contact me at 414-727-3050 or wjh@gracelandcemeterywi.com.

10 Things Grieving Children want you to Know

By: Pamela Gabbay, EdD, FT

#1 – Grieving children want to be told the truth.

Tell grieving children the truth with these considerations in mind: The age of the child; The maturity level of the child; The circumstances surrounding the death; *Answer questions as honestly as you can.*

#2 – Grieving children want to be reassured that there will always be someone to take care of them.

Grieving children spend a lot of time worrying about another person in their life who might die. **To help alleviate this fear, it's important to reassure them** that there will always be someone in their life who will take care of them. Enlist the aid of their parent or caregiver to determine a plan for the children. Let the children know what the plan is.

#3 – Grieving children want you to know that their grief is long lasting.

Children will grieve the person who died for the rest of their life. Grieving kids don't "just get over it". **They will often be bewildered when other people in their** life have seemed to move on. Their grief changes over time as they grow and change over time.

#4 – Children often cope with grief and loss through play.

Children grieve through play. Typically, they cannot sustain prolonged grief. Children use play as a way to cope with their grief and to take a break from the grief.

#5 – Grieving children want you to know that they will always miss the person who died.

People die, but love doesn't die. Grieving children will miss the person who died for as long as they live.

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#6 – Often, grieving children want to share their story and talk about the person who died.

Having an opportunity to tell his or her story is often beneficial to a child's healing process. Sharing memories about the person who died is also very important.

Grieving children don't want to forget the person who died – they are also worried that others will forget their person.

#7 – Every child grieves differently.

Every child has his or her own grief journey and own way of grieving. Some children might be more expressive with their grief. Some children might keep it all in.

Siblings grieve differently. Just because children come from the same family doesn't mean that their grief will be the same. It is important to honor each child's story, even if it is different than his or her sibling's story.

#8 – Grieving children often feel guilty.

Grieving children will often feel pangs of guilt, Even if the guilt is not justified and has no basis in reality.

#9 – Even though I might be acting out, what I'm really feeling is intense emotions of grief.

Grieving children frequently feel sad, angry, confused, or scared. Since they might not know how to express all of these emotions, they often end up acting out instead.

#10 - If you're not sure what a grieving child wants, the best thing to do is to ask.

When in doubt, ask a grieving child how you can help. Check in with the child – do they want to talk about the person who died? Maybe not. Expect a myriad of answers. Do they want to write about their grief or do some other activity to express their grief? What do *they* need?

§ You can help grieving children by:

Listening; Really *hearing them* when you're listening; Following their lead; Validating their feelings; Answering their questions; Seeking out additional resources, as needed.

Pamela Gabbay, Executive Partner, The Satori Group

Co-Author with Andy McNiel of *Understanding and Supporting Bereaved Children: A Practical Guide for Professionals*

Email: Pamela.Gabbay@TheSatoriGroup.org

Infant Death Center Provides Outreach and Support For Those Who Have Lost a Child

By Bill Hoffmann



Joanna O'Donnell, Project Coordinator at the Infant Death Center which is part of The Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin, wants cemeterians to know about their organization and the services that they provide. Joanna comes from a cemetery background, having previously worked at Pinelawn Memorial Park in Milwaukee, which is a part of the Tribute Companies.

The Children's Health Alliance is a non-profit organization that works out of Children's Hospital in Milwaukee. The Infant Death Center is an initiative of the Children's Health Alliance. It is a statewide program that offers resources to any Wisconsin family who experiences an unexpected infant death. They provide resources and support that can help families as they move through the healing process. They also provide families with a **directory of resources** that are available throughout the entire state, and they can provide families with a consult from a **pediatric pathologist** when the cause of death may be difficult to discern or understand.

Joanna connects families around the state with grief and bereavement resources, gives referrals to the pediatric pathologist at Children's Hospital and she participates with fetal infant mortality review teams with the goal of improving birth outcomes. Sadly, Milwaukee has experienced one of the highest infant mortality rates in the entire country, and according to Joanna, 2017 showed an increase in what is already a tragic death rate.

Joanna would like for all the cemeteries around the state to be aware of the services that are offered by the Infant Death Center and to consider referring families to them, when they have experienced the loss of an infant.

Joanna's contact information is jodonnell@chw.org, her phone number is 414-337-4571, they are on Facebook and Twitter @chawisconsin the organization's website is www.chawisconsin.org/grief. They also offer a newsletter called Healing Hearts which you can subscribe to.

Mormon Beliefs on Death & Burial

*Kelly Pretty, Pinelawn Memorial Park,
Milwaukee*

Mormonism. The first recollections that may come to mind are the Latter Day Saints commercials on television or local church representatives canvassing the neighborhood with educational flyers. While these pieces of paper can remain on doorknobs for weeks, how many individuals truly understand Mormon beliefs much less those on death and burial?

In order to embrace Mormon beliefs on death and burial, we must understand the origination of the faith. Mormonism traces its beginnings back to the spring of 1820 when founder Joseph Smith began having visions of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and one in which an angel guided him to a buried book of golden plates, the source that served as the foundation for the Book of Mormon. By June 1829, Joseph Smith had completed this book which adopted teachings from ancient prophets and Judeo-Christianity practices. By 1830, the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints was born with converts believing that there is an Old Testament, New Testament and this modern version.

While converts continued to flock to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the focus of the church became family, uniting together as brothers and sisters as spiritual children of God. Lay ministry became important for church members to voluntarily serve their church in various callings throughout their lifetime. In addition to the prophet the church is divided into wards (mainly by geographical location). Ward leadership is headed by the Bishop who has two counselors. All worthy men in the church may enter the priesthood. Women may become involved in Relief Society and younger people join youth groups. All of the organizations have concentrations in service such as Utility Teaching, Home Teaching, Compassionate Service, Humanitarian Aid, and the Welfare System.

The basics of service in the Church of Latter Day Saints are temples, sacred buildings where covenants are made with God. They are serene places where the public cannot enter unless a Mormon follower personally invites you or it newly

Help Wanted!!

The WCCA Reporter needs help. If you would have an interest in helping produce a quarterly newsletter that is distributed to our membership I would love to talk to you. There are a number of areas where help is needed, whether it be talking to vendors about advertising, writing articles, or just production, I can find a spot for your assistance. Interested individuals should contact Bill Hoffmann at 414-727-3050 or wjh@gracelandcemeterywi.com.

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Diocese offers free interment for cremated remains

By Patricia Kasten | The Compass
December 6, 2017

ALLOUEZ — In 2016, half of the funerals in the United States (50.1 percent) involved cremation. The number was slightly higher in the state of Wisconsin, all according to the Cremation Association of North America. By 2030, the National Funeral Directors Association projects that the rate of cremations will cover 71 percent of all deaths.

After the cremation, though, what happens to the remains? Sometimes, they end up in someone's home because of lack of funds, or because the survivors aren't sure about the teachings of the church. Others are not able to let their loved ones go as they struggle with grief. Because of this, the Diocese of Green Bay is offering free interment of cremated remains in its mausoleum at Allouez Catholic Cemetery. The service, and placement of the cremated remains in the All Souls Remembrance Crypt in the mausoleum, is open to anyone, of any faith or of no faith.

On Saturday, Dec. 9, at 11 a.m., a special committal service for cremated remains will be held at the Allouez mausoleum. Bishop David Ricken will lead the service, which is planned to become an annual event. For more than 50 years, the Catholic Church has accepted cremation, and allows the same funeral rites for those who are cremated as for those who are being buried or entombed. However, not everyone is aware of this and some may still remember a time when cremation was not allowed by the church. This is one reason for a service such as the one on Dec. 9.

Church recognizes Cremation

"There's still a stigma out there of Catholics and cremation," said Michael Poradek, Divine Worship Director for the Diocese of Green Bay. "Cremation is a perfectly legitimate decision for Catholics today, recognized by the church." He added that it is also acceptable to have a funeral with the cremated remains present and that the rites are the same as when the body itself is present — except for the placement of the white funeral pall and for an alternate form of dismissal.

"It is always preferable to have the body present, at least for the funeral rites," Poradek added, "for the main reason that we respect the body, we treat the body with respect and honor, and also to provide people with the opportunity to mourn with the body present — to see the body, to come to closure and come to grips with death — the death of their loved one, but also their own mortality."

Funeral costs a factor

Still, since funeral costs can be high, Poradek said that the church accepts that a funeral may need to take place with cremated remains.

What happens after that funeral can be more complicated. "The problems we're having are, a lot of times, people are taking the cremated remains home," Poradek said. "Or they're dividing the remains. Or they're being created into jewelry." He has even heard of some cremated remains being made into tree fertilizer pods. The church frowns on this, as well as the practice of scattering ashes, he said, because such acts don't respect the dignity of the body.

Burial of cremated remains

In October of 2016, the Vatican released a document regarding cremation, explaining the same thing: “By burying the bodies of the faithful, the church confirms her faith in the resurrection of the body and intends to show the great dignity of the human body as an integral part of the human person whose body forms part of their identity.” Burial of cremated remains in a cemetery or placement in a mausoleum is acceptable, and can be made affordable for many people.

“People say, ‘I’ll just take them home because it’s more financially feasible,’” Poradek noted, adding that this is partly why the diocese is offering free committals at the Allouez cemetery. “This provides people the opportunity — for free — to be able to be interred,” he said. The remains will be placed, individually, within the All Souls Remembrance Crypt. There will be a book with the names of all those interred in that crypt. If, at a later time, families wish to move the cremated remains to another part of the Allouez cemetery, they can be disinterred from the crypt for free. If the crypt ever becomes full, the remains might be moved to another part of the cemetery, but such transfer will be done for free. The cremated remains will always have the consecrated grounds of the mausoleum as a final resting place.

Poradek said the idea of an annual All Souls Remembrance, and free interment for human cremated remains, began with the Archdiocese of the Milwaukee in 2016. The response to that first service in Milwaukee — with more than 20 interments on one day — led Poradek to look into arranging such a service in the Green Bay Diocese. He said the plan is to have an annual event, held close to or on All Souls Day (Nov. 2). He added that other dioceses around the country are planning similar services.

Providing security of remains

“Having (cremated remains) interred at the mausoleum allows families to visit them,” he said. “It allows for a permanent location; it allows for some security for the remains; and it allows for people to come and visit.” He added that burying and praying for the dead are recognized as works of mercy in the church. And, from a practical standpoint, interment in a mausoleum avoids the problem of what to do with cremated remains as time goes by.

“Sometimes they (cremated remains) are left behind in people’s homes when they clean out deceased persons’ homes,” Poradek said. “They may not even know who it is — sometimes they have to do some checking into that. Sometimes people inherit the urns.”

In order to have cremated remains interred for free, an interment authorization must be filled out and filed with Allouez Catholic Cemetery and Chapel Mausoleum. There is no charge for the form or for interment in the All Souls Remembrance Crypt. For more information, contact Mary Breivogel, cemetery administrator at (920) 432-7585.



built or renovated. Mormons adhere to Provident Living and are taught to be prepared spiritually, financially, in education skills, an emergency preparedness.

Because Mormons are often fully prepared for life challenges, they of course want to prepare for their own mortality. Both traditional fully body burial and cremations options are practiced. The viewing of the body usually takes place the night before the final burial in the church. There is not a standardized format for what should happen for a Latter Day Saints burial giving the family options for what eternal wishes they would like to choose for their deceased love one. However, if the deceased is endowed he/she will wear temple clothing. If the funeral is held in the church, the bishop will officiate.

As cemeterians, it is important to approach Mormons with a preparedness point of view. When networking with their clergy, it is crucial to concentrate on the theme of family and family as a unit. Since it is unlikely that any immediate tours of the local churches in Wisconsin will be available, WCCA members can focus on the necessity and practicality of making arrangements prior to death. All group presentations given to church members must be non-commercial as Mormons are not allowed to endorse commercial businesses and their representatives.

*These notes are adapted from a presentation on Mormonism at ICCFA University, July 2017.

Fall Clean-Ups Cause a Stir

By Bill Hoffmann

Two different cemeteries wound up in the news, for doing what we all do, a fall clean up. Elmhurst Cemetery in Joliet Il wound up on the WGN evening news on November 13. With the headline **“Joliet Cemetery Apologizes After Removing Loved One’s Decorations From Graves”** ... and from CBS New York comes this headline, **“Loved Ones Furious as Mementos are Removed From Graves, Thrown Away at Poughkeepsie Cemetery.”** So why

all the commotion? After all, fall cleanup is pretty much standard operating procedure at most cemeteries, is it not?

In reading these stories, it is evident that the fall clean-up was either not communicated at all, or it was communicated very poorly. The others aspect of the story is that the initial response from these cemeteries was not very good either. There are a number of take-aways that we as cemeterians need to seriously consider. These kinds of issues are ones that bring a lot of emotion from grieving families and the media loves to capture this for the drama that it brings to your tv screen. Having good communication about your fall clean-up is critical in avoiding this scenario. Be sure you have the dates of the clean-up posted in plain view in your cemetery. If your cemetery has a website, be sure to put the notice there as well, displayed prominently. Another great way to communicate this is through a newsletter. If you currently don't have one, this should be a New Year's resolution for your cemetery. In today's hyper-sensitive and litigious society, communication is the best way to avoid headlines and law suits.

Responding appropriately is also critical. We need to understand that everyone is carrying a video camera in their pocket these days and they will often use it to air their complaint on social media and anywhere that they think they will be heard. We must try to respond to complaints in a way that conveys care and concern, even if we may not necessarily be providing the person complaining with the outcome that they desire. Seeming to be insensitive and uncaring will only guarantee that the issue will be escalated and made into something far bigger. We are daily dealing with matters of life and death. We need to proceed in our daily business with every life and death being important, meaningful and loved by somebody and that somebody has now entrusted us to care for that legacy forever.

As permafrost thaws, Western Alaska village cemeteries sink into swampland

Author: **Teresa Cotsirilos, KYUK**



As the permafrost thaws, Kongiganak's cemetery is turning into swampland. (Teresa Cotsirilos / KYUK)

KONGIGANAK — On a crisp day in September, the village of Kongiganak, or Kong, filed into a little white church and laid Maggie Mary Otto to rest.

The service was crowded. An elder and de facto marriage counselor, Otto was beloved. She was the kind of person who cooked steaming plates of walrus for her community every January for Russian Orthodox Christmas – even though she wasn't Orthodox herself.

After the viewing, Otto's pallbearers carried her casket outside, placed it on a metal cart, and attached it to the back of a four-wheeler. Kong's cemetery is a 10-minute drive on a boardwalk over marshy tundra. A procession of four-wheelers followed the casket to a rust-colored hill and a smattering of chalk-white crosses. Rather than lowering Otto's body into the ground, pallbearers placed her casket on a low wooden platform, raised about 6 inches above the ground on blocks. A half-dozen men lifted a white, wooden box and placed it over her casket to protect it from the elements, covering it completely.

Climate change is thawing the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta's permafrost, and it's doing more than cracking foundations, sinking roads and accelerating erosion. In villages like Kong, communities have stopped burying their dead because, as the permafrost melts, the oldest part of their cemetery is sinking. Digging graves in the soggy ground was just making it worse.

Tribal administrator Roland Andrew guided a reporter through the cemetery. The white crosses stick out of the sunken ground at odd angles, some of them almost completely submerged in the brackish water. "After we dug down 6 feet, it created a lake around it," Andrew said. The swamp appeared about 10 or 15 years ago and then expanded, swallowing the graves around it.

Kong's tribal leadership is working to relocate the sunken graves to higher ground. (Teresa Cotsirilos / KYUK)

The graveyard in the neighboring village of Kwigillingok, or Kwig, is also sinking into swampland. After consulting with Kwig's elders for advice, Andrew said, Kong started laying its loved ones to rest in boxes above ground. Digging into the ground removes the plants and topsoil that insulate the permafrost and accelerates the rising water. Andrew said that the swamp stopped expanding when Kong stopped burying its dead, but a row of white grave boxes from about a decade ago are teetering at odd angles, sliding feet-first into the lake. The water is still causing problems.

[What climate change looks like in Alaska now]

Back in town, Otto's family hosted her funeral feast in an old high school gym. Community members piled their bowls high with seal stew and akutaq while children wrestled each other by the bleachers. Otto's daughter, Betty Phillip, sat quietly in a corner. Her mother was laid to rest on higher ground, but not all of her family is so lucky.

"Her dad and my grandpa," she said. "He's one of them that's under the water."

If she wears rubber boots that reach above her knees, Phillip said, she can wade close to his grave, but can't quite touch his cross. Others tell similar stories. One man said that his cousins tried to drain the water from around his grandparents' grave. When they were alive, they held the family together; his cousins didn't have much luck. Another woman, Hannah Jimmy, said that her parents, aunts, uncles, sister and best friend are all in the cemetery, buried together in a single row. They're underwater now. "We're so poor we can't even do nothing about it," she said.

Tribal administrator Andrew said that the village is trying to move the sunken graves to higher ground, but doesn't have the money yet. Thawing permafrost, he said, is warping Kong in other ways. The river is eroding the shoreline and Kong itself is sinking. The hill that the village stands on is slowly slipping down to sea level. When asked whether he thought that Kong would ever need to

be relocated due to climate change, Andrew was quiet for a moment, then sighed. "This hill used to be high," he said. "And it's still going down."

[Along a menacing ocean, Shaktoolik stares down climate change and refuses to budge]

He doesn't see Kong relocating. If anything, he said, Kong's population might double in size in the future. Residents in Kwig are talking about moving because of the seasonal flooding.



The newer graves in Kong's cemetery have been placed on higher ground. (Teresa Cotsirilos / KYUK)

Andrew wants to be buried next to his parents; he keeps a picture of them above his desk. They died last year within about eight months of each other after being married for over 60 years. Their grave boxes still smell like fresh paint and are wreathed in plastic flowers, propped up on blocks on

the cemetery's highest ground, at least for now.

This story was republished from KYUK with permission.

Other Resources and Associations

<http://www.icfha.org> - The Illinois Cemetery and Funeral Home Association

<http://www.mcainfo.org> - The Michigan Cemetery Association

<http://www.indianacemeteryassociation.org> - The Indiana Cemetery Association

<http://www.ohiocemeteryassociation.com> - The Ohio Cemetery Association

<https://www.mncemeteries.org> - Minnesota Association of Cemeteries

<http://www.aicemeterians.org> - Alliance of Illinois Cemeteries

ANNUAL CONVENTION AND TRADESHOW

Thursday, February 8, 2018
and
Friday, February 9, 2018



Embassy Suites, 1823 Abriter Court, Naperville, Illinois
Thursday: 11 a.m. - Registration begins and Tradeshow opens.
1 p.m. - Introduction of Suppliers followed by General Sessions.
5:30 p.m. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres with our suppliers.
Friday: 9 a.m. - General Sessions begin and continue until 3 p.m.

Cemetery Registration Form

✓ Earn 6 Continuing Education Units for Cemetery Managers, Customer Service Employees, and Funeral Directors by attending this convention.

Registration Fee: \$75

Registration includes: daily admission to convention trade show, program sessions, refreshment breaks, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, meals, door prizes, and closing reception.

If you want to receive continuing education credit, mark the appropriate box or boxes:

Cemetery Manager Customer Service Employee Funeral Director

NAME _____
CEMETERY/COMPANY (if any) _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____ FAX _____
E-MAIL _____

REGISTRATION \$75 per person: \$ _____

You can **join the AIC now** or current members can pay the 2018 membership dues by enclosing \$25 per person.

2018 MEMBERSHIP DUES (\$25 per person): \$ _____

TOTAL: \$ _____

SEND REMITTANCE TO: ALLIANCE OF ILLINOIS CEMETERIANS
2901 12th STREET
ROCK ISLAND, IL 61201
Telephone: 309-788-6622 Fax: 309-788-6734

On the Web at: www.aicemeterians.org Email: aic_secretary@mediacombb.net

HOTEL RESERVATIONS: For reservations call: 630-799-5900 or 800-EMBASSY and ask for the Alliance of Illinois Cemeterians convention rate of \$109. This all-suites hotel offers complimentary made-to-order breakfast to overnight guests.

 **Don't delay.** Hotel reservations must be made by January 16, 2018, in order to receive the convention rate. Reservations made after January 16 will be at a higher rate.

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Supplier Registration Form

Supplier Registration Fee: \$75 plus \$100 for a display table.
Suppliers may begin setting up Wednesday night.
Registration includes: daily admission to convention trade show, program sessions, refreshment breaks, cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, meals, and closing reception.

NAME _____
CEMETERY/COMPANY (if any) _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
PHONE _____ FAX _____
E-MAIL _____

Registration Fee \$75 per person: \$ _____

Display Table \$100: \$ _____

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*On behalf of the Wisconsin Cemetery and Cremation Association,
We wish you a blessed Christmas and a healthy and prosperous
New Year!*

