

# Making Your Cemetery the Trendy Hangout

by Daniel M. Isard, MSFS

**H**OW CAN SOMEONE MAKE A CEMETERY A PLACE that people will be happy to come to? The lore and fiction of our society have us avoid cemeteries. We even believed that whistling while passing a cemetery protected us. In the south, the Gullah Geechees believed in holding their breath to keep the “haints” away (“haints” is Geechee for haunts). Many people have their own personal experience of being in a cemetery typically involving saying goodbye to a loved one.

So how can someone make a cemetery a fun place to visit? Well, I have seen it done well. It takes a reset of your mindset. Think about who your consumers are? If you think your consumers are the deceased who are interred in your property, I would ask that you rethink that answer.

I think you have two groups of consumers—ones with an interest in the care of those interred in your property and ones who might choose to be interred at your site. There are some basics that you must prepare for if you are going to encourage people to come to the cemetery for other than moments of an interment service.

## Maintenance of Grounds

It should go without saying that your maintenance must be first rate. Mowing when the grass reaches a certain point is critical. Most people in your community view your property while driving by at a high rate of speed. They can't see whether each blade of grass is 1" or 2" long, but they can see if the grass is green from a far distance away.

Keeping the grass green takes water. We all know that the source of water is a major investment either out of cash flow or infrastructure by building wells and making sure irrigation is efficient. This takes money. Either budget your overhead properly or be prepared to not have as many sales.

Fencing is generally the first capital asset people see, so make sure it is in good repair. If you have any features, make sure they are lit at night, as people will drive by after dark. With today's solar options, it is easy to have lighting where electricity might not reach.

**Cemeteries are a community. It is not a community of the dead, but a community of the surviving. In that regard, it is a community that is growing.**

Assuming your property is prepared to encourage people to come on site, let's think about calendar events that would entice people to come onto your property.

## Sectarian Celebrations

Religious dates are a natural. People tend to come visit their loved ones. But you can make it more inviting for them. Let the people know you will have flowers for them to purchase, maybe supporting a charity (Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts manning the booth). Take pictures of the flowers that were put on the graves from different angles. Offer to place flowers on the graves of people who have had their kids move out of the area (again benefiting the charity manning the flower booth). Have music performed. A bag piper is always a great feature, as the song of the pipes goes to the soul of the listener.

If your cemetery is sectarian, you can have some religious leaders offer prayers. If you are non-sectarian, you can have speeches from community leaders.

You should record the event and offer to distribute copies to the people who attend. It is another contact point for you. At the end of the video, have a slide that tells of the upcoming events.

## Veterans & First Responders

Veterans are the number one affinity group that funeral and cemetery businesses market to. You can offer to plant flags on the graves of vets or have flags onsite for families to place. Once again, provide music including pipers and drummers. A 21-gun salute is an epic stirring moment. Maybe there is a local aeronautics group that can do a fly over.

Our society evolves. One relative constant is a reflection upon the service of our police officers and firefighters. Honoring the memory of first responders is a natural for your cemetery. It should be a public gathering with speeches and other points of recognition. These matters bring the press out in large numbers.

## Soothing Music

Cemeteries are serene places. Being large flat areas, sound travels well. Sunday afternoons with music can be very inspiring and give people reasons to visit their departed family members in your stewardship. The music can be chamber music or any calming music, but I am not sure the world is ready for punk rock just yet.

## Fundraisers

I have seen cemeteries bring people out for community fundraising efforts. Imagine offering an outdoor barbecue during the week. Have a charity sponsor the event and the charity gets all the revenue. You supply the food and the staff. Have tables

set for people to sit at and maybe have some displays set-up around the area promoting some part of your cemetery. Your objective is to get people onsite. You win and the charity wins.

### Night Events

Imagine a nighttime event where people at dusk take small white bags, filled with a little sand and a candle, which they would inscribe with the name of a loved one. Then place these along the roadways of your cemetery. It becomes a great visual. You can have a drone fly over and as dusk turns to darkness, it becomes a very powerful image. It is also a wonderful active memorial for those creating the inscription on the bags.

What about a social event at night in the cemetery? You can rent a large screen and host a movie night. You can also have

a musical concert with a local performer. Again, a great concert venue, just don't go too late for the sake of the neighbors.

### Community Building

Getting people onto your site is simple and so very important. Cemeteries are a community. It is not a community of the dead, but a community of the surviving. In that regard, it is a community that is growing! If each person interred in your cemetery has 20 loved ones, and if you have 10,000 total interments, you have access to a community of more people than can fit in the largest college football stadium. You need to build a relationship with them.

We know that cemeteries tend to draw people from a larger radius than do funeral homes. Typically, someone will drive by three funeral homes to get to a cemetery.

Almost 80% of all cemetery sales, at need and pre-need, are made to consumers who already have friends and family interred within your property.

Which one of these programs should you offer? Try them and I guarantee your profit will increase dramatically. ☑



**Dan Isard, MSFS**, is founder of The Foresight Companies LLC, a Phoenix-based business and management consulting firm specializing in mergers and acquisitions, valuations, accounting, financing HR services and family surveys. He is the author of several books and hundreds of published articles in industry magazines, including "The Director's Finance 201" column. He can be reached at 800.426.0165 or [danisard@theforesightcompanies.com](mailto:danisard@theforesightcompanies.com).



## Choose a funeral and cemetery trust team that shares your vision for the future.

As a national leader in funeral and cemetery trust services, Regions understands it can be difficult to navigate the highly regulated environment of the industry. That's why the Regions Funeral and Cemetery Trust Services team is staffed with both experienced professionals in trust administration and knowledgeable Portfolio Managers. Our dedicated team goes beyond traditional trust management, offering ancillary services for your tax and legal needs to streamline your trust's financial growth.

To learn more about how our team can help your company, contact our Funeral and Cemetery Trust Services Manager.

**David Falconer | 713.244.8083 | [david.falconer@regions.com](mailto:david.falconer@regions.com)**

**Pre-Need Funeral | Cemetery Merchandise | Perpetual Care**



© 2021 Regions Bank. Member FDIC. Only bank deposit products are FDIC insured. Some products and services are made available through Regions Asset Management, a business unit within Regions Wealth Management. | Regions and the Regions logo are registered trademarks of Regions Bank. The LifeGreen color is a trademark of Regions Bank.

**Investment, Insurance and Annuity Products:**  
Are Not FDIC Insured | Are Not a Deposit | May Go Down in Value | Are Not Bank Guaranteed  
Are Not Insured by Any Federal Government Agency | Are Not a Condition of Any Banking Activity