

Historic walk

Spangler leads Union Cemetery tour

A walk through Redwood City's Union Cemetery, where many veterans from the Mexican and Civil War are buried, will be held at 10 a.m. Friday, Veteran's Day.

The walk, sponsored by the Archives Committee of the Redwood City Public Library, Inc., will be led by local historian Nita Spangler.

More than 50 veterans of the two wars are buried at the cemetery and Spangler will discuss recent historical research on the cemetery done by Archives Committee members.

Those interested in joining Spangler should wear walking shoes and bring cameras or sketchbooks. Also, bring an umbrella or rain gear because the walk will be held even if it rains.

The cemetery is located on Woodside Road, just west of El Camino Real.

For more information, telephone (415) 366-6654.

Veterans Day

Historical Tour Of Union Cemetery

A walk through Union Cemetery is slated for 10 a.m. on Veteran's Day, Friday, Nov. 11, under the auspices of the Archives Committee of the Redwood City Public Library, Inc.

No other public ceremony for the holiday is planned for the cemetery where more than 50 veterans are buried.

Local resident Nita Spangler will lead the walk to visit graves of veterans from the Mexican and Civil Wars, and will explain recent historical research

on the cemetery by Archives Committee members.

Interested persons are invited to join the walk promptly at 10 a.m. and to wear walking shoes. Cameras and sketch books are appropriate as will be an umbrella in the event of showers. The tour will be conducted rain or shine.

Members of the Archives Committee will be present at the cemetery between 10 a.m. and noon to provide cemetery information to visitors.

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Delays in Union Cemetery renovation bring new objections

By Mario Dianda
Tribune staff

Historians are losing their patience with Redwood City's reluctance to spend committed funds to renovate historic but deteriorating Union Cemetery.

Although the City Council last year had budgeted \$359,000 for the project, none of that money has been spent because the city is facing financial hard times.

"The cemetery sits there in disarray," Jean Cloud, a member of the city's Historic Resources Advisory

Committee, told the council in frustration a week ago. "The only new story is vandalism."

Describing the 129-year-old cemetery as a "national treasure," Cloud lamented that it lately has become a target for grave diggers as well as vandals.

Last January, police reported that someone broke into two crypts and left behind a human skull. The alleged culprits have been arrested.

"This has been on the backburner already," Nita Spangler, a member of the Union Cemetery Committee, said in an interview about the proposed renovation.

"That's six acres of prime land in a very highly visible area that needs open space, so it's not a wasteful project at all," she said.

City Manager Jim Smith said the anticipated improvements have been put on hold due to a "leveling of revenues" that will force the city to defer many needed projects.

He presented council members with a list of 27 capital improvements for which funds had been reserved this fiscal year, and asked them to rank them according to priority.

Without diminishing the importance of Union Cemetery, Smith said he believes that priority should be given to installation of storm drains at the Fifth Avenue neighborhood, reconstruction of track-damaged Chestnut Street, construction of a new police station and establishment of a sidewalk repair program.

Councilwoman Georgi La Berge agreed that those projects may appear more important than renovating Union Cemetery "because people aren't using the cemetery."

On the other hand, La Berge cau-

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tioned, "the sad thing about it is that it's easy to put that kind of project (cemetery) aside and never do anything about it."

If nothing else, La Berge said she hopes the council will erect a large sign to tout the cemetery's placement on the National Register of Historic Places, and replace some of the grave headstones that have been knocked down or broken off.

"It's all really part of the whole beautification program," La Berge said, referring to efforts to improve the city's appearance. "That can be a very nice looking area," she added.

Spangler said a group of town residents formed a cemetery association in 1858 when a local citizen asked them to stop burying impoverished squatters on his property.

With the landowner's help, the association managed to have state legislation enacted for creating rural cemeteries. As a result, it obtained burial rights to the current cemetery site for \$500, and charged \$10, \$15 and \$20 for plots from 1859 to 1919.

The cemetery had been deeded in trust to the governor, transferred to state ownership in 1947 and finally transferred to the city's ownership in 1962.

Today, the cemetery is officially known as California Historical Landmark No. 816.

Spangler said about 2,000 people have been buried at the cemetery over the years, including about 50 Civil War veterans. As far as she can tell, none of the veterans were Confederates, Spangler added.

"This was the only cemetery available for quite an area around," she said.

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No one has been buried there since 1959, historians say, and the cemetery steadily has deteriorated from near neglect.

Peter Griffiths, director of the city's Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department, said his maintenance workers try to control the weeds, pick up trash and do some selective watering.

What the department would like to do with the \$359,000 is landscape along the cemetery's Woodside Road approach; build a 4-foot-tall galvanized fence around the property; install an automatic irrigation system; erect a 12-foot-high, low-level lighting system; and build an entry road into the cemetery from Woodside Road near Wegman's Nursery with a parking lot for three to five cars.

EDITORIAL

Budgets and Graveyards

So far, things look pretty good for those folks who have been advocating the renovation of Union Cemetery on Woodside Road. At the recent city budget hearing, councilmembers voted unanimously to include a rehab project for the cemetery on a "priority list" of capital improvement projects. Though the budget has not yet been formally approved, the council seems to stand behind fixing up the run-down site.

Members of the Union Cemetery Committee, as well as many other individuals should be congratulated for their spirit of community activism. They made presentations to the council and planning commission on several occasions, retelling the history of the cemetery, voicing their disgust that the gravestones of some of the city's founders remained overturned or broken and in general doggedly pursued what they thought was a worthy cause.

It worked. A plan that for two years had been included in the budget, then shelved, now seems to be a reality. The proposal presented to the council by the Union Cemetery Committee includes plans for construction of a fence, added lighting, irrigation and signs, a good start for rehabilitating an important piece of Redwood City's history.

For those who are disgruntled because the project has taken so long to come to fruition, we would suggest they take a look at the city's capital improvement schedule for the next few years. We don't believe the city has delayed the refurbishing of Union Cemetery out of indifference. Finances are tight and city officials have the dubious honor of trying to figure out how to complete millions of dollars worth of capital improvements with only a fraction of the funding.

Deciding who gets what is not a fun job. Nor is it particularly enjoyable at times to pursue a cause and fight city hall. However, this time the process seems to have worked.