



# City of San Buenaventura

MISSION SAN BUENAVENTURA - founded 1782  
PARKS MAINTENANCE DIVISION

October 10, 1975

Mr. Daryl Berlin  
Administrative Assistant  
City of Santa Rosa  
P. O. Box 1678  
Santa Rosa, California 95403

Dear Mr. Berlin:

Pursuant to the request of Assistant City Manager Charles Cate, it will be my pleasure to try to assist your city by relaying information as to how the City of Ventura restored an old blighted cemetery into a beautiful memorial park.

After the completion of our beautification project, I requested city staff to interview all those involved so there would be a record for future reference. A copy of that report is included in the material I have compiled.

The City of Whittier was also interested in our project and the same cooperation was extended to their people. Today they equally enjoy the beauty of a restored cemetery.

In reading the report it is important to note that many of the original ideas were eventually changed. I will attempt to review some of the highlights found in the report and place them in separate categories.

## PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Announce well in advance in all local publications the plans the city has in beautifying an old cemetery as part of the bicentennial year.
- Contact as many of the relatives of the people buried that you can locate and explain your project plans.
- Post signs at the cemetery explaining your project.
- Contact all of your local churches requesting support or agreement with your project.
- Have the local press keep the public informed as to your progress during the restoration.
- Announce that no graves will be disturbed.

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PUBLIC RELATIONS (Continued)

- Remember that the cemetery is sacred ground.
- Most important is to keep a low profile of activities during restoration.

TOMBSTONES

- This portion of the project can become a nightmare.
- Remember, the State of California Controller's office requires you to store the tombstones for seven years.
- I found their office most cooperative.
- Store the tombstones in a secured area (most important).
- Do not sell or give away a single stone, except to relatives.
- Announce that relatives can pick up their tombstone at the storage area.
- Make all relatives sign a receipt for any stone picked up.
- After seven years you are required to bury the stones not claimed by relatives.
- Do not deliver any stones to relatives, but assist them at the storage area.
- You will be deluged with requests from citizens to utilize the tombstones after the seven years. They want them for art work, walls, patios, etc., but the only answer is to bury them and stay out of trouble.
- Do not offer to place the tombstones flush to the ground, but guarantee a marker at the grave sit.
- You may run into problems with the concrete base below ground that supports the tombstone. Some of the bases are larger than the tombstone and you must be careful in removing it or you will disturb the grave. This is when people thought we were removing bodies, so again I say be careful.

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#### TOMBSTONES (Continued)

- Record every existing stone on an engineering grid as you might have a request for a stone that does not exist.
- Many stones were stolen and must be so recorded.
- I stored the tombstones and above ground bases, but all of the perimeter plot markers were removed and buried.
- Lay out a grid of the entire cemetery prior to removing the first stone.
- Keep a file system on every stone in the cemetery arranged in alphabetical order.

#### CRYPTS ABOVE GROUND

- Now you are in a super sensitive area.
- We had six crypts in our cemetery.
- No matter how difficult it is you must contact a relative of the deceased before you can enter a crypt. In one case I settled for a sixth cousin in order to get permission.
- I explained to the relative that the city desired to remove the remains, place the remains in a concrete vault, remove the crypt and bury the vault in the exact location of the crypt.
- In order to guarantee that the assignment would be conducted with dignity, I volunteered to personally perform the task and to photograph the sequence of events. The photographs proved that the remains were buried at the same site.

Photographs taken:

1. Opening the vault
2. Removing the remains
3. Placing the remains in a concrete vault
4. Lowering the vault into the new grave

This took positive thinking and I highly recommend that this work be performed by a local funeral establishment.



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#### CRYPTS ABOVE GROUND (Continued)

- In order to keep a low profile only one crypt was entered per week.
- If I saw any cameras the project was cancelled (the press was able to obtain only one picture of a vault being lowered into the ground).
- It took less than five minutes from the time a crypt was entered and the lid closed on the vault.
- All photographs taken during this vital period were turned over to the City Clerk and remain on file.

#### GRADING, IRRIGATION AND LANDSCAPING

- The Park Department was responsible for the entire project and as Superintendent of Parks I served as coordinator throughout the restoration of the cemetery.
- Remember, put one person in total charge of the project.
- Our Landscape Advisor was responsible for the landscape design and the grading, irrigation, seeding, shrubs, flowers and tree planting were inhouse.
- Plant an abundance of trees in order to prevent ball games of any type to take place.
- Plant all trees in the original cemetery roadways (not over graves).
- Irrigation system should be automatic.
- Select graceful trees for aesthetic appeal.
- The landscaping should be designed for low maintenance.

#### GRAVE MARKERS

- After considerable discussion it was decided to place a suitable marker on the graves of only those families making such a request.
- There are approximately 2,300 graves in the cemetery and a marker for each grave would have amounted to a considerable cost.
- I have had about thirty requests for markers in ten years.

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GRAVE MARKERS (Continued)

- The grave markers are made of black granite 6" x 12" x 4" listing name, date of birth and death only.
- Permission to place tombstones flush to the ground was denied.
- The marker must be anchored in concrete or vandals will haul them off.
- The estimated cost of each marker was \$20.
- All markers were made at a nearby monumental company using their surplus material, but not from our cemetery.
- No reason why you cannot salvage granite plot markers for future grave markers.
- Your Engineering Department can locate any grave from their grid.
- Place all markers in the same direction and locate them close to the original tombstone.
- Place a 2" concrete border around the marker to protect the stone from mower reels and edger blades.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION

- ~~Do not permit the placement of play equipment anywhere on the turf as it is not a park.~~
- Years later pressure will be generated to convert this green open space into a park and guarantee to the relatives of the people buried that this will not take place.
- Have your City Council dedicate the completed project as a Memorial Park, to remain always as open space.

I have enclosed the project report and a collection of material that might


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be of assistance to your future exciting development.

Every time I drive by and observe this beautiful Memorial Park I feel a sense of pride in our department's contribution, dedicated to the memory of so many citizens of Ventura.

Any further assistance I can offer, please feel free to ask.

Good Luck,



Edward R. Lupton  
Superintendent of Parks

ERL:sk

cc: Charles Cate, Assistant City Manager