

Making a Lasting Impression

By Sandra Goldman

Cemeteries are complex. They require commitment for eternity. They are an important part of the community as a place for the living to visit the final resting place of their loved ones. They are places of natural refuge and are distinctive centerpieces, giving character and uniqueness. They are landmarks memorializing history, events, and people.

British writer, Neil Gaiman, writes in his acclaimed history, *The Graveyard Book*, "Wander any graveyard long enough and you will find it - water stained and bulging, with cracked or broken stone, scraggly grass or rank weeds about it, and a feeling, when you reach it, of abandonment."

We at the Hebrew Cemetery are very proud of our holy grounds. Although not much more than a decade ago, some of Gaiman's wording might have fit, today the Hebrew Cemetery is a well-manicured landscape with a master plan. Our board transformed the land into a statement of serenity, honor, and community.

I believe that it is crucial that cemeteries need to be well-cared for in order to insure that they are comfortable places to visit. The bottom line is that those who are looking to choose their final resting place will make their decision, in part, based on how they embrace the property.

With this in mind, I am extremely grateful for the way the community has embraced the current expansion of the Hebrew Cemetery and the construction of a Memorial Building. We are pleased to announce that over 75% of the project already has been funded. The Leon Levine Foundation presented us, at the Annual Memorial Service in Sep-

tember, with a surprise grant challenge: It will match, dollar for dollar up to \$100,000, for new pledges made between now and December 31. The pledges are payable over five years.

In the past, the board purchased adjoining lots, added new fencing around the property, opened a new entry on Statesville Avenue and did some extensive landscaping. Now we are in the process of nearly doubling the number of plots available to the Greater Charlotte Jewish community.

As some of you have already seen, construction has already begun on the grounds. In less than a year the Memorial Building should be completed, housing a chapel big enough to hold midsize funerals and unveilings, a family room for privacy, bathrooms, and maintenance storage. The focal point of the chapel will be the former marble ark from Temple Beth El. A touch screen will help visitors locate graves.

If one googles "shabby and unkempt cemetery," one can find nearly a million references in the United States alone. What a sad statement. Curb appeal is the exterior look of a property. It is the first impression the land makes on families and visitors as they drive up. Many people look at a cemetery to see how much care is given and how well the cemetery is maintained. The looks exemplify the feeling a cemetery wishes to convey. And once in a while (in this case, only the third time in 145 years) the cemetery needs the community to step up and continue to complete this task.

Of course, the difficulty with fulfilling the vision of a professional, beautiful cemetery is the cost. It is not as simple as budgeting for lawn care and machinery. If not planned accordingly, bud-



Hebrew Cemetery Association

ets deplete. Access roads fall into disrepair, trees want for trimming, and structures suffer. But with careful planning and funding, the beauty of the cemetery can be preserved. For this reason, all funds raised in excess of the construction costs will go into an endowment to care for the cemetery in perpetuity.

I am delighted that, thanks to the generosity of this Jewish community, our Hebrew Cemetery will be neither a sad statement nor part of a gloomy statistic. Your commitment will ensure that Gaiman's dire description will never apply to the Hebrew Cemetery and that these holy grounds will always be a distinctive landmark within Charlotte. We are making a lasting impression.

To learn more about the new memorial building, pre-planning or to arrange a personal tour of the cemetery, please contact Sandra Goldman by phone at 704-576-1859 or by email at director@hebrewcemetery.org. If you wish to hear more about the expansion and how to make a five year pledge, please contact Bill Gorelick at 704-996-7776 or bgorelick@gorelickandsons.com; or Marc Silverman at 704-362-0400 or marc@mdavidproperties.com. Donations may also be mailed to the Hebrew Cemetery Association, 5007 Providence Road, Suite 113, Charlotte NC 28226. ☆

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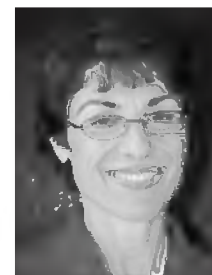
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