



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

FALL 2018

A Chat with Our Super Cemetery Supervisor!

In this issue, we take the opportunity to interview our valued Cemetery Supervisor, Jeff Briggs.



CRC SUPERVISOR, JEFF BRIGGS

Q: Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

A: Both sides of my family settled in the Cortland and Scott area, back in the Revolutionary War era. On the maternal side, there was the Stanbro family, some of whom actually fought in that war and whose graves can be found here in the Cortland Rural Cemetery as well as in the South Cortland Cemetery out by Wal-Mart. The paternal branch of the family were the Briggs, who were known for being hardworking, prominent business owners of various kinds. When I grew up, athletics were always pushed and I excelled at them while going to high school in Homer — wrestling and football in particular — which led me to school Johnson City, where played under my uncle Jack Stanbro (who was a Hall of Fame wrestling coach) and earned a scholarship to go to Cornell for a time. Unfortunately, I was injured and wound up at Saint Lawrence for a couple years, went to Cornell, fell in love, began my family which ultimately grew to three beautiful children, and started my career at 24 years old at Marietta where I climbed

quickly to the position of supervisor. From there, I became a ramp agent for Piedmont Airlines (now USAir) in Syracuse, and then moved to Federal Express — which was really just getting started at becoming the amazing business it is today.

Q: How did you wind up in the cemetery business?

A: I always had a fascination with history and was never fearful of cemeteries; in fact, coming from Homer, I was always amazed by the beauty of Glenwood Cemetery and used to stop there to say “hi” to John B. Briggs (who, incidentally, was once Mayor of Homer and a NYS Assemblyman) and my other relatives who are resting there in the front row. A few years after my time at Marietta, Piedmont, and FedEx — and given my longstanding passion for both family and local history, I heard about and took the opportunity to become a sexton at Virgil Cemetery, which is a smaller non-profit cemetery not unlike Cortland Rural. From there, I was offered the chance to take on this much larger cemetery and between the new ideas and energy here, and the fact that I also have my grandpa and grandma and many other family members here, I decided to make that move and join the effort to improve things here.

Q: What do you like most about being the cemetery supervisor?

A: First, I think it's important to pay back to society and, on a one-to-one basis, I just get a good feeling from helping people through this very, very difficult time in their lives. Second, I very much enjoy that I have my grandmother and grandfather Stanbro up in section B-2 here: That just makes me feel connected and also motivates me to do my level best for the institution. Another thing about this position is that I have a lot of variety in my day every day; so, the multitasker in me really enjoys bouncing around through the different facets of the job, whether it's driving around to pick up supplies, presenting to community groups, setting up a funeral with one of our excellent funeral homes, or working through any number of things I do each day in the office...from keeping records, helping our grounds team with site locations,





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**Want to
Continue Our
Progress?**

*Please consider making
a tax deductible gift to
the Cortland Rural Cemetery
and returning it using
the enclosed envelope.
Thank you for your support!*



**Our Newest Trustee...
Welcome Sara Tily!**

Say hello to the CRC's newest member of the Board of Trustees: Sara Tily!

Originally from Fabius, Tily resides in Freeville, NY and holds the post of Personal Banker for KeyBank in Cortland. Previously, Tily was Assistant Branch Manager at Citizens Bank in Ithaca and Salon Manager at Zoom Tan in Cortland/Ithaca. She holds an Associates Degree from Tompkins Cortland Community College, where her academic experience included working with individuals with developmental disabilities. And, prior to her studies, Tily volunteered with the Prevention Network's Teen Institute Program.

"We're very excited to welcome Sara to our team," said Kathy Cincotta, President of the cemetery's Board of Trustees. "We fully expect her experience with financial matters and operations, her interest in engaging with and investing her time and talents to our community, and her innate enthusiasm and energy to be valuable assets in managing and providing oversight to the cemetery."

Tily officially joined our Trustees at the Cemetery's September 2018 meeting and is expected to serve for the Trustee's standard term of three years.

A Chat with Supervisor Jeff Briggs continued...

coordinating with monument companies, and a lot more frankly. Finally, it's a great place to come to work in the sense that I genuinely feel this cemetery is literally the most beautiful piece of property in the City of Cortland. You know, people drive by our 300 yards of road frontage at 45 mph — and then one day, they take the time to pull in and take a look around the whole 44 plus acres of trees, signs, and beautiful monuments. So many of them are shocked at the beauty and I'm proud of that moment and having some part in it alongside our tremendous ground crew, led by John Duff and Harold Greene

Q: And your biggest challenges?

A: Many people don't realize that we're not run by the city, town, or some other entity. On top of that, I'm always sorry to see rising costs in fuel and hikes in things like worker's comp insurance — which is now nearly 20% our budget, can you believe that? The minimum wage increases that have happened and are still ahead of are a real challenge, even though — don't get me wrong — we really do want our staff to be well compensated and motivated.

Then there's the trend towards cremation, which has had and will have a big negative impact on us... And the fact that people are so mobile and just deal with death, burials, and memorializing their loved ones differently than they did in the 1950s, '20s, or even back in the 1800s when we were first established. People are leaving New York State to live elsewhere; we have snowbirds going back and forth every year putting down roots and making friends in both places which makes it unclear where "home" is; and families often hold onto, share, or scatter their loved ones' remains instead of burying them in a family plot that they tend to every month like in the old days... Things have just changed. But we're trying hard to keep the faith and stay afloat.

Q: How do you personally feel about your cemetery's mission and place in the community?

A: As I said, I just really enjoy the people aspect of this business and knowing most of the families we care for by reputation or even more personally than that... Being able to say "I went to school



With Help, We Narrowly Squeaked Through a Tough 2018!

Through the hard work and stewardship of our grounds crew, the CRC looked beautiful this season. But beneath our pretty exterior, we simply did not see the traditional Spring and Summer uptick in burial and lot-sale revenues: To wit, burial revenues were down nearly 36% over 2017 (\$24K vs. \$38K) and sales of lots/cremation niches were down 59% compared to last year (\$17K vs \$41K)...neither of these external market conditions being within our control.

Fortunately, we were blessed to have individual donors and long-time friends of the CRC who heeded an unusual mid-summer appeal for financial support (those kind and generous folks are listed in the sidebar). And we benefited from institutional support, as well, which also helped to stem the tide and move us 'one step forward.' These included:

- **Ralph W Wilkins Foundation** - who speedily and generously answered our call for help, with a \$3,400 grant to be used in paying down our mower and tractor financing.
- **J.M. McDonald Foundation** - who flexibly approved redirecting the final \$10,000 of its 2015 grant to the cemetery, enabling us to fund the majority of our recent Chapel basement-entry construction project.
- And (fingers crossed!) it looks like we may also receive a grant of \$10,000 (initiated by Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton's office) from the **NYS Department of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation**, also to be directed toward preserving/repairing our Chapel.

Thanks again to these good and community-spirited individuals & organizations for helping us weather this rough, and hopefully temporary, patch!



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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

A Chat with Supervisor Jeff Briggs...

with your sister, or your son, or your mom" just makes it a little easier to put someone in the ground, get through this part of the grieving process, or even help them understand and manage the financial aspects involved. It's just gratifying to see the stress go off their faces, and frankly, to hear back from them sometimes that they appreciated it — I'm pleased to say we have a whole drawer full of thank you notes. And, by the way, it's not just me. Our grounds guys are the same way: They may look a little rough and tough, but they have big hearts and endless compassion. People sense that, whether we're helping them with pre-planning, guiding people to an outdoor funeral, or visiting the grave of someone they lost years ago.

In the end, I'm proud running a business, but I'm proudest of helping people through difficult days and of what we've built here over the last few years — the improved conditions, the cemetrail signs, the maintenance of our buildings. The community has noticed and responded to that, and people who understand our situation really appreciate we're doing that instead of letting the place get run down. That's it. I'm just proud.



Individual Contributors to Summer 2018 Appeal

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Other News at the CRC!

- Thank you to **Charles K. Wanish, Jr.** for funding the beautiful restoration of our west-side Chapel door, in memory of Patricia N. Wanish. (The craftsmanship was exquisite!)
- Recent publicity for the CRC included recognition by the Travel Channel and inclusion in the informative and fun “Wickwired” video series produced by the great folks at **1890 House Museum!**

RESTORED
CHAPEL
DOOR ➤

TRAVEL CHANNEL
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1890 HOUSE MUSEUM CURATOR, JARRETT ZEMAN, DOING THE MUSEUM'S OCTOBER INSTALLMENT OF WICKWIRED VIDEO SERIES IN FRONT OF THE WICKWIRE MAUSOLEUM.



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CORTLAND RURAL CEMETERY

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www.cortland-rural-cemetery.com

