

Eternal Justice, Inc. In Action

"Money is last. The mission is No. 1."

Carolyn Jacobi, the founder of Eternal Justice, Inc.



with the Governor, Parris Glendening of the State of Maryland as he signs in to law the bill to create the Maryland Cemetery Oversight Committee.

Maryland was riddled with complaints from consumers and small businessmen. Consumers were being denied their rights to precious choices. They had no where to go. There was no watchdog. Then Carolyn Jacobi, the founder and the force behind Eternal Justice, Inc. began her crusade with the help of some business friends and consumers, the job was accomplished. Maryland passed a bill to create a Cemetery Oversight and it is up and running today. It is not perfect and there is still a lot of work to be done. Carolyn and Eternal Justice, Inc. are still on the job.

Carolyn Jacobi, the founder of Eternal Justice, Inc., visited her father's grave in the Mount Auburn Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland, an historic cemetery which much to her surprise was in total disrepair. She even found human remains in plain view. As a result of this experience the idea to start Eternal Justice, Inc. was born. Ever since that day, Carolyn has worked tirelessly to right the wrongs she finds in the death care industry, all in the name of the consumer. She has become the most active and productive consumer advocate in America.

Historic cemetery still in shambles; Grave site of AFRO founder located

By Tony White
Baltimore AFRO Staff

Washington AFRO-Newspaper publisher, Frances L. Murphy II, visited Mount Auburn Cemetery in Baltimore last week to pay respects to her grandfather, John H. Murphy Sr. The remains of the founder of the AFRO American Newspapers rest in the historic cemetery, as do the remains of most African Americans who died in Baltimore during the period of racial segregation in America.

Upon reaching the cemetery she was dismayed when she could not locate her grandfather's grave. In that regard, Mrs. Murphy joined a host of frustrated people whose relatives or friends were laid to rest in Mount Auburn Cemetery in plots that can not be located due to over growth or have been located but found empty.

Carolyn Jacobi kicked a human skull while navigating seven foot tall vegetation in the process of searching for her father's grave.

Gloria Wainwright prepared to bury her mother, Hester Lane in a plot that supposedly held her father, a sister and a niece but upon



Photo by J.D. Howard

UNEARTHED HUMAN SKELETAL REMAINS lie in plain view at Mt. Auburn Cemetery, some still wrapped in clothing.

opening the grave discovered her father's body was not there. Human skeletal remains are strewn

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Thanks to Eternal Justice and Carolyn Jacobi ...

Cemetery owner charged

County says Clinton facility has been operating without license

By AMY DOMINELLO

Journal staff writer

The owner of a Clinton cemetery was criminally charged yesterday for operating a cemetery without a license.

Alex Williams, owner of the Forest Hills Memorial Cemetery, was charged by the State's Attorney's Office with the misdemeanor. If convicted, Williams could face one year in jail, a \$3,000 fine or both.

The cemetery, located on the corner of Clinton Way and Brandywine Road, was also the impetus for County Council legislation introduced yesterday by Councilman M.H. Jim Estep, D-9th-Upper Marlboro, to tighten county regulations governing cemeteries.

The actions came after allegations that older graves at the site were being dug up to make room for new ones and that burials were not taking place at the actual site picked out by relatives of the deceased.

Earlier this month, county police removed what may have been human remains from the cemetery, after the director of a death-industry watchdog group reported finding bones at the site.

Williams declined to comment yesterday, but has said previously that he feels such claims were untrue and meant to undermine his business.

The bones were taken as evidence and State's Attorney Jack Johnson said they are being examined by the Medical Examiner's office in Baltimore.

Johnson said his office was awaiting the medical examiner's report to determine if more charges should be filed, but said there has been nothing to indicate that the bones did indeed come from the cemetery.

He said prosecuting for not having a license was the only avenue his office could take.

"These are regulatory issues that we have no control over," Johnson said. "With respect to how these things are regulated, there is nothing we can do."

Although a state law enacted in 1997 re-

quires cemeteries to be licensed, a legal loophole prevents the state from taking any action against the Forest Hills Memorial Cemetery, because the owners have not obtained a license to operate.

Steven Sklar, director of the state's office of cemetery oversight, said his office has made continuous efforts since March to have the State's Attorney's Office prosecute the cemetery owners for failure to have a license.

Sklar's office can only take action against licensed cemeteries.

Williams has said previously that attempts to obtain a license were made, but he has not completed all the proper paperwork and is in the midst of obtaining a license.

Sklar said the charge was notified in March of the problem.

"It certainly will put everyone on notice about the status of the cemetery," Sklar said. "I would think that those who would refer families would take notice of the action."

Estep said his legislation mirrors the state laws, but "puts some teeth into the law."

Estep said he hopes "to take some action and bring some resolution" to the situation at Forest Hills Memorial Cemetery.

"We'll be able to take some action against violators," he said.

A cemetery that was not licensed could face a fine of \$5,000.

The county's Health Officer would be charged with regulating cemeteries and those who provide burial services.

The legislation would not force cemetery owners to get both a county and state license, but would allow the Health Officer to shut down cemeteries that were not meeting certain standards.

Sklar said he felt the county's Department of Business and Regulatory Affairs can order the cemetery to stop operating under current county law.

In addition, a forum on the Forest Hills Memorial Cemetery will be today at 7 p.m. at the District 5 Police Station in Clinton.

Below, Carolyn is at work in Forest Hills Cemetery.

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Families Protest Cemetery Conditions

Prince George's Investigator Finds Bones, Coffin Parts at Unlicensed Graveyard

By HAMEIL R. HARRIS
Washington Post Staff Writer

Dozens of people whose friends and family are interred in a Prince George's County cemetery gathered yesterday to protest unkempt conditions at Forest Hills Memorial Gardens and to voice concerns that old graves are being dug up to make way for new ones.

About 24 people gathered in a circle and said a prayer for the deceased, then walked through the cemetery inspecting grave sites. The section of the cemetery where the most recent burials have taken place is sprinkled with patches of grass, and many graves are unmarked or bear only concrete blocks with numbers.

"I was at peace to think that my grandson was buried out here. I am devastated not knowing where he is," said Ernestine Thornton, an Orton Hill resident who buried her grandson, Maurice Pinckney, at Forest Hills in 1998. Thornton said she could not find a headstone or other sign to indicate the location of his grave and has been unable to reach cemetery owner Alex Williams. Several telephone calls to Williams's office by a reporter yesterday went unanswered.

Keema Richardson said she was visiting her grandmother's grave Oct. 1, the day after she was buried, when she saw parts of a skull and coffin in a large mound of dirt in the cemetery. Prince George's officials are trying to determine whether they had been excavated from old graves.

The state's attorney's office has since charged Williams with operating the cemetery without a license, a misdemeanor. The charge carries a maximum penalty of a year in jail and a \$3,000 fine.

"It is not only illegal what is going on at Forest Hills, it is immoral," said Carolyn Jacobi, founder of the cemetery watchdog group Eternal Justice Inc. and the organizer of the protest.



Cemetery activist Carolyn Jacobi, right, uses a metal rod to check the depth of a grave at Forest Hills. With her are Richard Mackey, left, Keema Richardson, who believes the grave belongs to her grandmother, and Fred Jackson.

Jacobi walked through the cemetery in Clinton yesterday, periodically poking a metal rod into the ground to try to identify grave sites. Protesters who joined her said they were shocked when the probe struck objects, presumably coffin liners, just inches beneath the surface.

Sandra Peaches, director of the county's Office of Business and Regulatory Affairs, said her investigator visited Forest Hills and found a number of irregularities, including bones and coffin parts.

"Mr. Williams has to come into compliance, or else he can find another profession," Peaches said.

County officials issued a cease-and-desist order Tuesday that charges Williams with more than 20 violations of the county business code. Some of the more serious infractions are that the cemetery doesn't have a proper site map in-

dicating where graves are, that there is no proper backfilling of graves and that the red paving stones used as markers are not permanently attached and are easy to move.

"It is questionable that the remains of the deceased can be accurately located," Peaches said in the order, in which she calls for customers to be given a written contract before burials take place.

The County Council is considering legislation that would allow the county to shut down any cemetery operating without a state license.

William Stover, whose back yard abuts the cemetery, said he found a headstone marked "Freddie Wheeler Jr. Born Jan. 26, 1928" in a mound of dirt that cemetery workers had piled up near his property while digging new graves.

"The bad practices of the cemetery not only affect me and the

community, but it is affecting the families of the loved ones in the cemetery," Stover said.

Opened in 1902, Forest Hills has had several owners over the years and in the 1990s went into bankruptcy. Neighbors said it deteriorated into an abandoned scrubby patch. Williams, 55, bought it in 1997, the year the state Office of Cemetery Oversight was created.

Williams has said he bought the cemetery to fulfill a dream of "providing an economic service for people in need." He has denied moving older graves to accommodate new burials.

"I saw the fragments, but I don't know where those bones came from. We don't dig up graves," he said earlier this month.

Richardson and other family members say they planned to relocate their loved ones to other cemeteries.

Shown below are grave concerns and broken promises.



An overgrown grave at Forest Hills Memorial Gardens has only a broken concrete marker to help identify its occupant. Many of the graves at the Clinton cemetery are in disrepair.

Eternal Justices makes a difference again!

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Gazette Community News

CommunityNews

'It's already been so traumatic'

Vigil held for buried as Forest Hills cemetery owner awaits sentencing

by Joel Furfari
Staff Writer

"Eleanor, Robert, Mary, Charles, Martin, David." A solemn mood prevailed over the crowd of 30 or so shivering people as they formed a circle and recited the names of their loved ones buried at the Forest Hills Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Clinton.

The occasion was a candlelight vigil held Sunday on the day before the cemetery's owner, Alex Williams, was to go on trial in Upper Marlboro for operating without a license. Williams pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor crime and is now awaiting sentencing.

As a brisk wind kicked up and the gray sky loomed overhead, clusters of aunts and uncles, mothers and children wandered around the hazy cemetery looking for the burial site that had caused them so much heartache.

The case has become the focus of numerous relatives who say Forest Hills is disorganized and unmapped. Many aren't sure where to lay flowers.

"We had the actual burial one place, then the next day we came out here and she wasn't there," said one relative.

The people who have buried relatives at Forest Hills have become an active vocal group in the past few months. They took pictures of their family's plot. They used a steel rod to probe graves for caskets. They commiserated on the general state of the 35-year-old cemetery on Grandview Road.

They pointed out what they said was a seemingly endless amount of travesties they have had to endure. At one point, a group of five or 10 people circled around a gravesite.

What looked like a four-inch bone poked out of the lower topsoil. "That sure ain't a chicken bone," one of them said.

A few feet from the supposed human bone was a small gravestone. It was square and red. The only markings on the stone were black numbered decals — like those put on mailboxes. It simply said, "46MCH553."

There were some positive moments to the occasion though.

Carolyn Jacobs, a cemetery activist who organized the vigil, rallied the group the day before the Williams trial.

"This is only one part of the crusade we're waging," she said. "You no longer want Prince George's County officials to ignore that they have laws on the books that say a cemetery must be mapped and planned before the street can open that cemetery."

The moods that day ranged from anger and sadness to disbelief. For many, the physical state of the cemetery was shocking.

Gravestones seemed as if they were haphazardly strewn on the ground. Topsoil was loose and eroded. Large areas had no grass covering at all.

Johnson said she was no longer surprised at the condition of the cemetery. She said she has taken her own initiative to keep tabs on Forest Hills' landscape.

"I found bones in the dirt, skulls coming out of the dirt," she said. "I've been doing some investigating myself."

Carolyn Jacobs (top) probes graves, and if anyone is actually buried there, she said. Many who attended a vigil Sunday at the Forest Hills Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Clinton have told her conflicting locations.

Vanetta Johnson, of Springfield, Va., wiped a tear from her eye.

"It's already been so traumatic to have this experience of not knowing," she said.

Johnson went on to recount how like many others who buried their relatives at Forest Hills — she quickly lost track of where her mother was buried in 1998.

"At the time [of the burial] you try to trust people," she said of Williams. "He was very kind with us that day."

Cemetery owner pleads guilty to misdemeanor

by Joel Furfari
Staff Writer

Alex Williams, owner of the beleaguered Forest Hills Memorial Gardens Cemetery in Clinton, pleaded guilty Monday to the misdemeanor crime of operating without a license.

Williams faces a maximum sentence of a \$3,000 fine and one year in jail.

Consumers who buried their friends and relatives at the cemetery began organizing in October when complaints became widespread. Jacobs and others said their loved ones were buried in the wrong place, but both parties said they expect negotiations to go well.

"All I can say to you is that the meeting, on the surface, was quite positive," Jacobs told about 50 of the Forest Hills relatives last Monday. "That doesn't mean everyone that I

For additional information and/or help or simply just to talk please feel free to call me.