



# MANTECA BULLETIN.com

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

## *'Friends' formed to care for cemetery*

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City Editor

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After all the recent bad news in the press about historic East Union Cemetery comes this silver lining.

A group called Friends of the East Union Cemetery has been formed whose purpose is similar to that of the Friends of the Library.

A small group of people, all members of the cemetery association, met Thursday last week "to do whatever we could to keep East Union Cemetery functioning," said Evelyn Prouty, one of the organizers.

"We're hoping to keep it clean and mowed with volunteers' help, and we're looking for volunteers!" said Prouty who, along with about half-dozen concerned individuals, already started doing just that this past weekend.

Prouty said there are different ways that an individual, families or service clubs such as the Rotary, Kiwanis, Soroptimists and other groups can help the Friends of the Cemetery.

Volunteer to pick up dead flowers from grave sites every Saturday, or every other Saturday if there are two groups that can alternate to do the job. This is something that perhaps youth groups such as the Boy Scout, Girl Scout or Rainbow Girls can do to help, Prouty said.

The cemetery is badly in need of someone to help fix the two lawn mowers that are used to cut the grass. The equipment is about 20 years old and only one of them works, "held together with hot glue and baling wire," said Prouty who had to haul in her own riding lawn mower at home last weekend to the cemetery to help cut the grass. "We have to do something about the equipment," she said.

Former cemetery caretakers Albert Qualls and John Strauss, who were laid off recently due to the cemetery's problems which are currently being straightened out with state Cemetery and Funeral Bureau officials, spent a good part of their time fixing the two aging lawnmowers.

Volunteer manpower is needed to mow the grass and to run the weed-eater around each headstone. Prouty said it takes two men two-and-a-half days just mow the grounds at the cemetery. Her group this past weekend worked five hours on Friday and nearly eight hours on Saturday to mow and weed-eat and still only got three-fourth of the job done.

"We need monetary donations," said Prouty, to help pay for utilities such as garbage, electricity and water. The cemetery, because it is unincorporated county property, has its own wells. However, electricity is needed to operate them, and without water the grass will die. The cost for PG&E is about \$400 a month. The monthly gas bill to run the mowers is about \$100.

"There's not quite enough money to buy gas the next time we mow. We can't make it with \$42 in the bank," Prouty said. They need at least 10 gallons of gas for each mowing, or about \$50.

Last week, they received \$1,400 in donations but most of that was used to pay the final checks of the two caretakers who were laid off when the state seized the cemetery association's endowment care fund and other bank statements and records. A new association board, the second one to be formed since the end of June when the problems started, is continuing negotiations and talks with state officials to get the 136-year-old cemetery back on financially solid ground again.

About \$1,000 a month is needed to keep the cemetery maintained to its current level. That amount includes bills to pay for PG&E, garbage, telephone, gas for mowing, and the cemetery insurance which, in fact, will expire on Oct. 23 if it's not renewed.

"People can also donate a gas card," if they want to help with the mowing, Prouty said.

The Friends of the Cemetery, she said, is "totally separate from the (cemetery) association and board, and the state can't touch our money."

The last part of her comment is meant to assure prospective donors that money donated to the Friends of the Cemetery will not be going to the state but will be strictly used to maintain the cemetery.

Part of the group's plan is to hold fund-raising events. "We're open to suggestions for fund-raising," Prouty said.

There are about "10 or 12 of us now," she said of the current Friends membership, and they're looking for more to help support the cause.

An account has been opened at Delta National Bank in Manteca where people can go to make contributions.

Donations can also be sent to: Friends of the East Union Cemetery, P.O. Box 591, Manteca, CA 95336.

For more information about how to help Friends of the East Union Cemetery or how to become a member, call 823-8533.

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