

SAVE AUSTIN'S CEMETERIES SUMMER 2010 E-NEWSLETTER

Cemetery Business Analysis Project

Earlier this year, the City of Austin's Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) hired Dr. Thomas Longoria, Associate Professor of Political Science, of Texas State University - San Marcos to conduct a comprehensive business analysis of the City's practices for managing cemeteries. The project scope includes a stakeholder input process and a review and analysis of current industry practices and standards for municipally-owned cemeteries across the country. The findings are being compared and contrasted with the practices used by the City of Austin (COA). The review of the COA-managed cemeteries also includes an assessment of current cemetery assets, service capacity and funding, management and operations, and an overview of input from stakeholders.

The project started in February 2010. A public forum was held on June 17th, which was attended by several members of Save Austin's Cemeteries. The project is scheduled to conclude with a comprehensive final report at the end of August 2010.

The expected outcome will be the recommendation of strategic business solutions and specific service-level options for future Council consideration. The scope will also include a commentary on the role and responsibility of municipalities in managing cemeteries. Dr. Thomas Longoria will serve as the principal researcher. His areas of specialization include urban and ethnic politics, urban administration, and non-profit administration.

You may be wondering now about the current management practices, and what the City has tried in the past. In brief . . . the City, through the Public Works Department, began operating cemeteries in 1856 with the acquisition of Oakwood Cemetery located in central east Austin. The city currently owns five cemetery properties (Oakwood, Oakwood Annex, Evergreen, Plummers, and Austin Memorial Park). Cemetery operations were assigned to PAR in 1987. In 1990, following three consecutive years of revenue shortfall, the department outsourced the day-to-day funeral services and related operations to InterCare Corporation. InterCare continues to serve as the City's cemetery management contractor.

In our next newsletter, we plan to bring you the long-awaited results of the Cemetery Business Analysis project.

Cemetery Preservation

The following item was provided to us by Anne Shelton from the Texas Historical Commission.

The cemetery preservation program of the Texas Historical Commission (THC) offers two programs to assist volunteers: the Historic Texas Cemetery designation and the RIP (Record, Investigate, Protect) Guardian program. Participation in both programs can have a long-term positive impact on the preservation of any historic cemetery in Texas.

Many cemeteries across the state are in perilous situations and may face endangerment due to a variety of threat. The Historic Texas Cemetery designation is the first step to preserve and record these sites. The designation records historic cemeteries in the county deed record and is the official recognition from the Texas Historical Commission. Even cemeteries fortunate enough not to face similar threats benefit from the designation. By completing the designation process, applicants build a relationship with their county historical commission as well as cemetery preservation staff and raise awareness for the cemetery and local preservation efforts. Of the five Save Austin's Cemeteries, two have been designated as a Historic Texas Cemetery: Austin Memorial Park and Oakwood.

Folks interested in continued involvement with the cemetery opt to participate in the RIP Guardian program. RIP Guardians are the statewide network of cemetery preservation volunteers who receive technical assistance and training from the THC. Participants have the opportunity to build a preservation plan for the historic cemetery and help influence the long term preservation of the site. Obtaining the Historic Texas Cemetery designation is a prerequisite for participation in the RIP Guardian program and we are thrilled that both Austin Memorial Park and Oakwood joined the statewide network.

Are you a descendant or have ties to Evergreen, Oakwood Annex or Plummers? Please contact us at 512.475.4506 so we can help you get started with the Historic Texas Cemetery designation.

Announcements

SAC Video Series – you may have noticed some rather professional looking videographers at the back of the room during our guest speaker presentations this year. As part of our mission to educate the community about the City's historic cemeteries, and to foster an appreciation for their value as community resources, we will be publishing selected presentations as DVD's suitable for watching at home (or in the classroom). These aren't just home movies of the lecture. Our friends at Buckalew Media weave together the footage from the lecture with the images from the presentation to create a professionally produced film version of the presentation.

Our first release in the video series comes from Dr. David Gracy's entertaining and informative presentation on the Littlefield family. After reviewing the edited version of his presentation, Dr. Gracy had this to say about videographer Jeff Leech's work: "The work he did to highlight and focus in on things I was talking about is just tremendous. I can't compliment him enough. I wish I had the capability to do this when I am making a live presentation. His work makes seeing relevant things so much easier that it really makes watching the video fun and far more informative. . . . Thank you so much for having my presentation videoed and getting such skilled production folk to fashion the talk and slides into a magnificent show."

Dr. Gracy has been kind enough to grant SAC permission to sell the DVDs, with the proceeds going towards SAC's cemetery preservation activities. You can find out more, and order your copy of the DVD, via the Shop page on our website (www.sachome.org).

SAC's annual Murder, Mayhem and Misadventure (MMM) tour will be held on October 30th from 10 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Tours will leave approximately every half hour, and are free to the public on a first come, first spooked basis. If you would like to volunteer during this event, please contact us!

Photo documentation will start up again on October 2, as it should have cooled off by then. Keep an eye on your in-box or SAC's website for details about the time.

Mark your calendars for the inaugural Save Texas History Symposium in Austin, Texas

Saturday, November 6, 2010. The topic of the symposium will be "Discovering Spanish and Mexican Texas." The Save Texas History Symposium will be hosted by Commissioner Jerry Patterson and the Texas General Land Office. The symposium will be held at 1700 North Congress Avenue in Austin, Texas between the hours of 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. The Save Texas History Symposium is only \$25 per person. To register, call 1-800-998-4GLO or email: archives@glo.state.tx.us .

SAC Volunteer Programs

It is never too late to get involved as an SAC volunteer! If you are interested in any of these topics, please respond to this email indicating which one(s) you would like to hear more about. The coordinator will organize a small group meeting for those interested in each topic, and this group will map out how to move forward with the project. Your level of involvement will be totally up to you... all you need to do is reply to get started! The Board identified the following topics as those that are most important and also most likely to succeed and benefit SAC's mission of preservation and raising awareness:

Oakwood Chapel Restoration (Leslie Wolfenden)

Volunteers will work with the Steering Committee to implement the fund-raising campaign, including planning and hosting special events to raise awareness, garner community and political support, and recognize donors.

Membership Development (Susan Lassell)

Volunteers can help identify potential target groups to invite to join SAC, strategize on launching a membership campaign, and design literature for use in membership campaigns.

Social Media (Facebook and website updates) (Leslie Wolfenden)

Volunteers can help establish the driving "message" and protocols for moderating the SAC Facebook page, identify options for updating the look and feel of our website, and suggest other opportunities for maximizing the use of social media to get the word out about SAC's preservation and education efforts.

Public Information and Advertising (Susan Lassell)

Volunteers can help develop our advertising procedures, develop a broader media contact list, and distribute PSAs for planned events.

Docents at Oakwood Cemetery chapel (Kay Boyd)

Volunteers will develop the schedule, logistics, and training needs for the program, recruit volunteer docents, and provide training and oversight for the volunteer docents.

Halloween Walking Tour (Dale Flatt)

Volunteers will discuss options for incorporating “characters” into the tour, plan the steps necessary to prepare for the tour, work with our researchers to write appropriate scripts, help the public information and advertising committee get the word out, and coordinate the characters and tour guides on the day of the event.

Research (Danny Camacho)

Volunteers will assist with research for upcoming events, receive an orientation to repositories such as the Austin History Center with tips on research techniques, and provide their results either as organized documentation or fully developed tour narratives. Volunteers will prioritize these projects, coordinate with designers to help with graphic design, and strategize how to get the materials published on a non-profit budget.

Open House and Heritage Day Event (Leslie Wolfenden)

Volunteers will develop the concept for a collaborative event with local heritage groups such as the German-Texan Heritage Society, French Legation, Susannah Dickinson House Museum, with an Open House where we have demonstrations on how to properly clean headstones, how to document a cemetery, have guest speakers throughout the day, and have people share their personal family stories, photos, and documents, coordinate with affiliated organizations and experts, schedule the event for SAC’s upcoming events calendar, and begin event planning tasks.

We look forward to working with you on these exciting projects!

SAC is on Facebook! If you are too, we hope you'll "like" Save Austin's Cemeteries!

If you would like to stop receiving SAC emails, or if you have updated contact information, please respond or send a note to info@sachome.org.