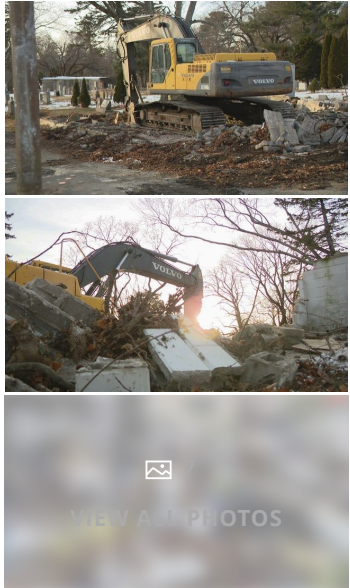


NBC 10 I-Team: Cemetery sees improvement after years of dumping, lack of upkeep

by BRIAN CRANDALL, NBC 10 NEWS Mon, January 20th 2025 at 6:00 PM
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Gravestones inside the Oakland Cemetery in Cranston. (WJAR)

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A cemetery that looked more like an overgrown dumping ground is in the midst of a makeover.



The Oakland Cemetery in Cranston was the [source of complaints](#) the NBC10 I-Team has reported on for years.

On a late December day, a sign of progress.

An excavator knocked down the dilapidated caretaker's cottage there.

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The roof of the building had collapsed.

Now the space has been cleared.



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John Dorsey, the court appointed lawyer overseeing the cemetery's finances and clean-up. (WJAR)

"A major corner has been turned now," says John Dorsey, the court appointed lawyer overseeing the cemetery's finances and clean-up, after the city of

Cranston cited the cemetery for upkeep violations.

“The caretaker's cottage was the biggest eyesore and the biggest safety issue at the cemetery, by far,” Dorsey told NBC 10.

The owner of the private cemetery, Russell Dodd, is now essentially out of the picture.

Dodd told the I-Team in 2023 [he did not have the money](#) to maintain the cemetery.

He said there was not enough business and sued the bank holding the cemetery's trust fund, claiming it wasn't releasing enough money to care for the property.

Last May, the courts gave Dorsey control of the \$300,000 in the trust fund to take charge of the turnaround.



An excavator inside of the Oakland Cemetery in Cranston. (WJAR)

“We're excited about the progress that's been made,” he says.

Situated between Broad Street and Roger Williams Park, a place to remember the dead had become an eyesore, a place people came to dump their garbage, especially during the pandemic.

And upkeep was lacking.

"There were piles of bags of trash. The grass was knee high," says Pastor Russell Farmer.

He leads the Gateway Pentecostal Fellowship, a church that had no connection to the cemetery until he asked the Cranston's mayor's office a few years ago what properties could use cleaning up.

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Farmer's been [organizing volunteers](#) to come to the cemetery regularly ever since.

"I'm surprised at how it got ahold of me," Farmer told NBC 10.

"This was a huge village of people that came out over and over again," says Cristine DeMarco, who lives next to the cemetery.

And the difference from a couple years ago is noticeable.

"You look at it now and you can't even imagine the, literally, tons of garbage that were taken out of here," DeMarco told NBC 10. "You can call it a cemetery and not a landfill that happens to have people buried in it."



Piles of trash at the Oakland Cemetery in Cranston before clean up efforts. (WJAR)

“It's a cemetery now, a place of contemplation, memory, honoring past loved ones,” adds Farmer.

Dorsey credits the volunteers.

“It's been hugely helpful. The cemetery wouldn't be where it is right now without the help of the community,” he says.

The cemetery is no longer operating as a business or taking new burials, though Dorsey says requests to be buried near loved ones could potentially be accommodated.

So what next?



Overgrown grass and headstones at the Oakland Cemetery in Cranston. (WJAR)

“This is the beginning,” says DeMarco.

Dorsey hopes to get court approval to establish a non-profit to care for the cemetery going forward.

And some of the people instrumental in the revitalization expect to be part of it.

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Farmer says, “The non-profit is the long-term resolution this cemetery will never return to a dump status. And how awesome is that?.”