

Investigations 

Investigation: Bayside Cemetery damage

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Web produced by Jennifer Matarese, Eyewitness News

OZONE PARK, Queens (WABC) -- Eyewitness News went looking for answers about the horrible condition of the Bayside Cemetery in Ozone Park, Queens.

"We walked in the back and saw what was going on and we said, "Oh my God," Anthony Pisciotta said.

Anthony Pisciotta took matters into his own hands after getting tired of seeing the Jewish cemetery deteriorate year after year.

He reached out to Eyewitness News detailing the extent of the disrepair, neglect and vandalism at the Bayside Cemetery in Ozone Park, Queens.

"This is one of the worst cemetery's I've seen," Eyewitness News Investigative reporter Jim Hoffer said.

"Absolutely, the worst by far, beyond belief for something like this in New York City," Pisciotta said.

What really pushed this Catholic father to take action to clean up a Jewish cemetery was what he discovered in one of the damaged, crypts.

Just 15 yards from a busy street is a tomb, wide-open with two damaged coffins with the skeletal remains exposed.

Pisciotta says it had been like that for some time.

"These people have no dignity, no dignity left. Decomposed body lying out in the open like garbage, if you found a dog dead on the road, they'd pick it up," Pisciotta said.

Some of the video is too graphic to show.

There are several crypts busted open exposing the wood coffins inside to the elements and to vandalism.

Bayside is still an active cemetery as evident by a fairly new grave.

It has a rich history too, the burial site for civil war vets, even a survivor of the Titanic.

It's true, vandals through the years have desecrated this Jewish cemetery, but the bordering cemetery is well-maintained, the grass mowed, trees trimmed, fewer damaged tombstones.

Yet, when you cross into Bayside, it's as if you'd entered another world, a jungle of weeds and woods in which no one seems to care whether tombs are damaged, debris is piled high, or whether crypts, coffins and bodies are exposed.

Pisciotta blames Congregation Shaare Zedek of the Upper West Side for neglecting their cemetery.

"They have to know about this and they should at least come out and put something over the crypt to cover it to give these people some dignity," Pisciotta said.

The cemetery's owners, Congregation Shaare Zedek in a statement to Eyewitness News said for the past two years, they've been working to clean up the cemetery.

They say they were unaware of the problems with open crypts and coffins, but add that vandalism is a common problem for historic Jewish cemeteries and when it happens at Bayside, they try to remedy it.

If you have a tip about this or any other issue you'd like investigated, please give our tipline a call at 877-TIP-NEWS. You may also e-mail us at

the.investigators@abc.com.

Follow Jim Hoffer on Twitter at twitter.com/nycinvestigates and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/jimhoffer.wabc

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