

<http://wcbstv.com/seenon/dead.cemeteries.friends.2.1033486.html>

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## R.I.P.: Local Cemeteries Meeting Their Maker

**To Lay Your Loved Ones To Rest You Shell Out Big Bucks, But What Happens When The Resting Place Dies?**



WEST BRIGHTON, N.Y. (CBS) — The average cost of a burial plot today is more than \$4,000.

And no one would fault family members for expecting that their loved ones' resting places would receive proper care.

But as CBS 2 HD recently learned, more and more local cemeteries are now dying of neglect.

*Rest in peace?* Not at these cemeteries piled up with trash, weeds even junked cars.

"When burials stop, that's when the problems arise because there's no more revenue to earmark for anything in the future," said Mark Russo, president of the group Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries.

Neglect starts with landscaping and grounds keeping, so cemeteries all across the tri-state area are starting to look terrible, despite thousands of dollars families have paid to lay a loved one to rest.

"I had to literally wade through a sea of weeds that were chest high," John Lucker said.

Lucker said it's happening at Bayside Cemetery, where his grandparents are buried in Queens.

"It made me very angry when I realized that my grandparents had paid for perpetual care and clearly the money that they had spent for that care was not being utilized like intended," Lucker said.

Lucker recently filed a class action lawsuit against a Manhattan synagogue, the owners of Bayside Cemetery.

When CBS 2 HD recently visited the synagogue a worker told us clean up was under way, but the rabbi did not return our calls for additional comment.

On Staten Island, the organization Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries has been rescuing and rehabbing graveyards for 28 years. Many, like Travis Cemetery, are home to historical figures.

"There are great people buried here with wonderful histories," Lynn Rogers said. "The founders of Staten Island are in here and revolutionary soldiers."

Russo said calls for help with abandoned cemeteries come in from all across the country. Because most

cemeteries are privately owned, municipalities are not responsible for their upkeep. It's thanks to volunteers and donations that keep his work going.

The Fountain Staten Island Cemetery had been abandoned 60 years ago, but with the influx of \$100,000 worth of cash and countless volunteer hours families are once again able to come and honor their dead.

"We're here today because of what they fought for and because of the legacy they left and if we allow the legacy to turn into a junkyard and an abandoned cemetery, we're no better than what were trying to fight against," Russo said.

A court hearing over Bayside Cemetery is set for June 29.

If you'd like to learn more about Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries, including volunteering, please click [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

To volunteer or donate to Friends of Abandoned Cemeteries please send an [e-mail](#).