

050506DB cemetery

Plight of the plots

Local cemetery seeks security to protect history

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DAYTONA BEACH – When the International Association of Cemetery Preservationists was formed, founder Dusty Smith planned to restore and preserve the Mount Arrarat Cemetery in Daytona Beach. Despite the efforts that she and other members of the IACP have made, though, a lack of security on the property has allowed vandals, transients and thieves to continue inflicting damage.

Mount Arrarat is a historically black cemetery, built in 1889. The 6-acre property is now the final resting place of more than 600 people, including hundreds of veterans from as far back as the Civil War.

The IACP has worked for two years to restore and maintain the property. Members of the non-profit organization believe the cemetery should be restored, preserved and appreciated because of its historical value.

“These are the people that built this city, and now no one seems to care what happens to them,” Ms. Smith said. “They obviously can’t complain for themselves, so we are trying to give them a voice in the community.”

While the IACP volunteers work on the restoration project, man-made destruction continues in the cemetery.

Ms. Smith said she has seen the cemetery used as a place for deviants to use drugs and have sex.

“We’ve caught people smoking crack in there, and sometimes we find condoms and underwear just lying around on the ground,” she said.

Thieves and vandals have also terrorized the cemetery.

“People break and steal headstones and break into the vaults. They have stolen personal effects from graves and even removed bodies,” Ms. Smith said.

To protect the cemetery and deter further destruction, funds are needed to add security on the property.

“Even if we could just get some lights put up, that would help,” Ms. Smith said. “FPL has offered to donate the lights and poles, but we would need help from the city to install them.”

Because Mount Arrarat is a privately owned property, maintenance and upkeep fall to the families of those buried there and the stockholders of the property.

Though he had never heard of Ms. Smith or the IACP, Daytona Beach City Manager James Chisholm said the city is not permitted to work on private properties.

“I know of Mount Arrarat, but no one has approached me with any questions or proposals,” Mr. Chisholm said. “If that cemetery is privately owned, though, there’s really nothing we can do. The responsibility falls to the owners.”