

Holy Sepulchre a historic 'gem'

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

In 1871 Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid decided that the Diocese of Rochester needed one cemetery designed to meet the needs of local Catholics for generations to come. He bought 110 acres of land — located on both sides of what is now Rochester's Lake Avenue — consecrated it and began developing Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

More than 130 years later, the cemetery includes 332 acres and conducts approximately 1,800 burials a year, according to Jim Weisbeck, executive director.

"It's kind of like a gem that a lot of people in the Rochester Diocese don't realize exists," Weisbeck said.

The cemetery is usually very busy during May, especially if Memorial Day and Mother's Day weekends are warm and sunny, Weisbeck said. Memorial Day weekend alone can draw thousands of visitors.

He and his staff often field questions from Catholics regarding burial rules. For example, many Catholics aren't clear on the church's position on cremation. The staff often provides answers using a brochure published by the New York State Catholic Conference.

The brochure notes that Catholic teaching stresses preference of burial or entombment, but permits cremation as long as it is not chosen in denial of Christian teaching on the Resurrection and the sacredness of



Mike Crup/Catholic Courier

Ben Allen, an employee of Cooke Tree Service, rakes up fallen branches at the south end of Rochester's Holy Sepulchre Cemetery March 29.

the human body. According to the brochure, the church prefers for cremation to occur after the funeral Mass and stipulates that cremated remains must be given the same respect as the body. Scattering, dividing or keeping cremated remains in the home are not consistent with church teaching. Holy Sepulchre has two mausoleums that offer niches to hold cremated remains and also crypts to hold caskets.

Weisbeck said he occasionally hears questions about who can be buried in a Catholic cemetery. Holy Sepulchre's bylaws stipulate that cemetery plots can be sold only to baptized Catholics, but family members of those who bought the plots also may be buried there, even if the family members are not Catholic, he added.

In the mid-1990s, the cemetery installed an information kiosk that enables visitors to look up the locations of grave sites and print out maps to those locations. The first kiosk was so popular that another one was in-

stalled several years ago.

"We were one of the first in the country to put those in," Weisbeck said. Since then, he said, more than 120,000 location maps have been printed, and usage of the kiosks ranges from 25 to 50 persons per day, seven days per week.

Members of the community have a great deal of interest in Holy Sepulchre, noted Bob Vogt, associate diocesan archivist. Vogt served as the cemetery's first lay executive director from 1973 until his retirement in 1996, when he was succeeded by Weisbeck.

Vogt recently gave a presentation to the Greece Historical Society on the cemetery's background, development and history. He said he's done a number of similar presentations before because a community cemetery is something in which people will always be interested.

"What a cemetery is, is the history of the community, because all of the people are buried there, you can see their names, their dates," Vogt said.

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