

They did it again!

This time, City cemetery workers destroyed bushes and flowers on graves

The message was left on my answering machine at 11:26 am on Wednesday, August 8th. The caller was a young woman. She spoke about another ugly incident at Olivet Cemetery - something I thought we'd never have to deal with again, after the allegations of a city cemetery mowing crew running over American flags during the Memorial Day week.

She said the issue was about the cemetery "cutting down the bushes and the flowers," and expressed that she was "very angry."

When I spoke with the caller the following day, she told me that her family has a number of gravesites in a row in the far northeast corner in Olivet. She said that she usually goes out there every day to care for the graves but had missed a couple days due to illness. She and her family have living bushes and flowers and she takes a garden hose which she hooks up to a nearby faucet and she waters the live items each visit.

When she went out on Wednesday, she noticed that several rose bushes and other healthy bushes had been destroyed or heavily damaged. She initially told me that the crew had mowed over them.

Between the time of her call to me and my reaching her the following day, she had spoken with the new cemetery director and he had visited the area with her and her mother. As I easily determined Thursday night upon my first visit to the graves, considerable damage had been done but it was likely done with a "weed whacker" not a lawn mower. Bushes between headstones could not have been run over as there is not enough width for a mower to go through.

This time, unlike the extensive - and what I believe was deliberate damage to the flags near Memorial Day - this cemetery director did accept responsibility for the damage and offered to replace the bushes most seriously damaged.

I drove out to Olivet on Thursday night and took pictures of the damaged bushes. The caller and her mother had already policed the area and picked up the debris which was strewn about when the bushes were damaged. There were, however, at least three pieces of one of the destroyed bushes still lying among the dead grass. An examination of them indicated they had been broken off, as opposed to being cut off as a mower would do.

There is little more emotionally wrenching than dealing with damage to cemetery markers or decorations left on friends and family member's graves. There is a sub-human class that descends to such a level of deliberate damage or destruction.

The top picture at the right is of the east end of the row which suffered the damage. Before the replanting.



The four white arrows point to bushes that suffered extensive damage. The rose bush immediately to the right of the "Garcia" headstone appeared hearty enough to tolerate the damage and was not replaced. Three other bushes were replaced by the cemetery crew of Friday, August 10th. A robust red rose bush on the west end of this same row of markers was heavily damaged but had not been replaced when I took these pictures at about 5:30 pm on Friday, August 10th.

Seeing it had not been replaced, the family removed it and will wait a couple more days for the cemetery director, who has been exceedingly cooperative and accommodating, to replace that very large and impressive bush.

The bottom picture is of the same area after the bushes had been replaced. The tall butterfly bush is not visible by the brown stone and trellis but it was

replaced as agreed. The end bush, encircled by rocks, is also new. I have other pictures but chose to limit those printed.

The call alone would have been enough to prompt me to action but I had additional motivation because of the damage to the American flags, how the mayor denied any responsibility and the way the American Legion accepted money from the City in spite of that denial of responsibility.

I always thought that the damage was from the cemetery mowing crew and that it was deliberate. I regret that the Legion determined otherwise and chose reconciliation over remorse. I personally offered to cover the cost of the destroyed flags if the Legion wanted to hold the City to an admission of responsibility.

The Legion didn't and accept less than \$250 from the City - presumably for flags the City still maintains it did not destroy.

It would have been impossible for the City to deny this latest damage. This family, as so many others, holds their loved ones' gravesites very dear. I was told that their "threat" to contact "the paper" about the damage prompted immediate action and correction from the mayor this time.

While this response was commendable, to me it confirms my position that there are rogue employees on the cemetery crew and that they did not learn a lesson from the earlier (Memorial Day) experience because the mayor blindly supported their wanton behavior. They were home free. Will the new cemetery director take the kind of forceful action required to put an end to this destruction by people on the City time clock? Let us hope so.

The family is grateful for the action to replace the damaged bushes but it's not quite the same. There is more sentiment attached to those they placed initially.