

Complaints led to cemetery crackdown, city says



Flowers hang at a gravesite in Brandon Municipal Cemetery on Saturday afternoon. (Tim Smith/Brandon Sun)

BY ALLISON DOWD

The recent enforcement of a city bylaw, on the books for nearly a decade, has left some people wondering just how respected those buried in the Brandon Municipal Cemetery really are.

A spring cleanup of the cemetery, conducted late last month by staff, included the removal of any gravesite decorations that were thought to be old or unsightly, as per the city's cemetery bylaw.

The cleanup, undertaken without public notice, left countless families with loved ones buried in the cemetery left to wonder just where their treasured items had gone.

Donna Holder, whose father is buried in the Veterans section of the cemetery, told the Brandon Sun late last month that she was extremely hurt to find the handmade, wooden Canadian flag she placed on his gravesite nearly three years ago had been taken literally overnight.

At that time, she and her family assumed the decoration, like so many other flags that had gone missing from the gravesite over the years, had fallen victim to theft or vandalism.

"It really hurts. Like, this is my dad," she told the Brandon Sun during an interview on April 29.

It was only after the Sun ran her story that Holder said she was told by cemetery staff that her flag, along with hundreds of other decorations, had been plucked from graves as part of the seasonal cleanup and were

available for pickup at the on-site office.

According to the city's cemetery bylaw, which has been in place since October of 2000, borders, fences, railings, trellises, copings, hedges, iron posts or any ornamental material shall not be constructed in or around a grave or lot.

As for floral arrangements, the law also gives cemetery staff the authority to remove any funeral design or floral pieces that have become wilted, or after a period of 10 days, whichever comes sooner, or any other article or thing which, in their opinion, has become unsightly.

"They, all of a sudden, after how many years, are now enforcing this bylaw and didn't tell anybody?" Holder asked.

Rick Bailey, the city's director of public works, said it was a recent onslaught of complaints from members of the public that caused them to re-evaluate how the cemetery bylaw has been enforced in recent years.

"As soon as we start seeing things deteriorate, we have the authority to remove them ... from our end, we were maybe letting stuff stay there longer than it should," Bailey said. "Enforcement hasn't been consistent."

Bailey does admit that the city did not advertise the recent cleanup as well as it could have.

"We took it upon ourselves to go through these areas and do a cleanup," he said last week. "(But) I guess we could have done some advertising in the media. In hindsight,

that could have been our approach."

The rules covering flowers and other decorations extend even further when it comes to the Veterans section of the cemetery.

In that area, a maximum of two floral vases, no larger than the monument itself, are the only objects that can be placed on either side of a veteran's grave marker.

That portion of the bylaw was apparently created at the request of the Royal Canadian Legion.

It's that restriction that Holder feels is the most unfair part of the whole situation, noting that flowers and other memorabilia can still be seen at headstones within the Veterans cemetery.

"I just may put flowers back at my dad's grave and see what happens," she said, "because if you remove (stuff) from mine, then I want everyone's removed."

Bailey said they are in the process of reviewing the bylaw and are researching what other provincial jurisdictions use as a guideline.

For now, he said cemetery staff will do seasonal cleanups in the spring and the fall and will continue removing any decorative items that "don't make the grade."

"We respect the fact that people want to lay these items there and we appreciate and sympathize with that," Bailey said, "but we have been diligent at what we're trying to operate here."

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Museum hopes for more weddings: official

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Clemm said they've been blessed to have a chance at happiness this late in life and just wants to make the most of it.

"I just want to have a nice, happy contented life with as much time as I have left," he said.

"Gardening is a big thing for both of us and we both love to travel. We both really like good food."

"And don't forget our nightly scrabble game," Phyllis piped in.

Stephen Hayter, the air training plan museum's executive director, was pulling double duty at yesterday's wedding, as he is also the new

couple's son-in-law.

"It's wonderful because there are so many connections to their past, so it's memorable and familiar to them," Hayter said, noting the gathering planned to dine on traditional German food and would be entertained by bands performing war-time era music.

Hayter said it's very gratifying, after all the work that went into restoring the site's original canteen building, to see it being used for one of its original purposes.

"(During the time of the Plan) the canteen building was also a temporary chapel and it actually had Catholic and Protestant service. We don't have

any record of whether they had weddings 65 years ago, but they probably did," he said.

"This is the first time we've had a wedding in our canteen and it's exactly what we've love to have more of."

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Geocachers 'mob' local park as part of global event

BY ALLISON DOWD

It wasn't exactly a mob scene, but at exactly 12 p.m. yesterday, 45 geocachers in Brandon joined hundreds of thousands of other people across the globe by participating in World Wide Flash Mob III.

A "flash mob" is a large group of people who assemble in a public place and do something unusual for a brief period of time before quickly dispersing.

In this case, a small group of area geocachers—which could be described to the layperson as those who go on high-tech treasure hunts—converged around a large rock in Brandon's Dinsdale Park for 15 minutes of conversation, comparing notes and even a little bit of bragging about their conquests.

Geocaching has grown in recent years to be a world-wide recreational activity, in which participants use global positioning systems to search for hidden "caches", usually waterproof containers stuffed with trinkets and a log book.

Once discovered, the "find" is logged and trinkets can be traded out for other pieces, with the cache then left for the next person to discover.

Brandon resident "Boss Hogg," who geocaches with her family under the group pseudonym "Hogger Jeff and the Piglets," said the unique gathering was a fun way to put faces to the secret



Geocaching enthusiasts enter a draw at the end of World Wide Flash Mob III at Dinsdale Park on Saturday afternoon. A few dozen GPS cache hunt enthusiasts took part in the event. (Tim Smith/Brandon Sun)

identities of the geocaching world.

"A lot of geocachers don't know people's faces. So that's what a lot of this is for, to put faces to those names."

She said 12 new caches, some of which are hidden outside the city in towns like Minnedosa, Neepawa and Carberry, were announced prior to yesterday's mob meeting.

"A couple of them had already been found before noon," she said, " (Usually) they don't take very long to find because there is a First-To-Find prize, but there is actually one I know of that has not been found and it's been

hidden for over a year," she said.

"BeanCounter69", the handle used by one geocacher from Boissevain, said he and his wife, along with their two young children and family dog, love to jump in their "Geo-Mobile" and set out on the scavenger hunts.

"It's a good way for the family to get out and enjoy things," he said. "Geocaching will take you places that you might never, ever go. We went Geocaching on Christmas Day in 2005 ... It's just a good, family thing to do," he said.

"And the sneaking around part of it

is fun, too," he said, "With work, I travel. So it gives me something to do, rather than sitting in a hotel in the evening," BeanCounter69 said.

It's estimated there are more than 465,000 caches hidden in more than 220 countries, stashed near the Pyramids, floating in underwater caves—maybe even just down your street or in the local park.

For more information on geocaching in your area, you can log onto www.geocaching.com.

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In Brief

FIREBUGS TARGET MORE DUMPSTERS

Brandon police and fire officials were called to two separate dumpster fires in the city's south end early Saturday morning.

The first was reported just after 12 a.m. in the Brentwood Village trailer court and was extinguished by members of the Brandon fire department.

Crews were then called back to Brentwood Village just after 2 a.m., after a fire was sparked in a dumpster a very short distance from the first blaze.

Damage in both those incidents was contained to the bin's plastic lids.

The fires are still under investigation, which is being done so in connection with a string of nearly a dozen dumpster fires set around the city within the past few weeks.

Arrests have been made in at least two of those incidents.

A 16-year-old boy faces two counts of arson in connection to dumpster blazes between April 28 and April 30—one in the 300-block of 12th Street and the other in the 200-block of 12th Street.

Police also recently arrested a pair of 19-year-old Brandon women and charged them with arson in connection with a fire set behind a home in the 300-block of 13th Street late last week.

FOUR HURT IN CRASH IN WHEAT CITY

A 38-year-old Brandon woman will be charged with impaired driving after a two-vehicle collision sent four people to hospital late Friday evening.

Sgt. Rick Semler said preliminary investigation by the Brandon police service shows the woman was heading east in the 3300-block of Richmond Ave. shortly after 10:30 p.m. when the Ford vehicle she was driving swerved across the centre line and struck a westbound Dodge van.

Three people in the van and one passenger in the Ford were taken to hospital.

All were treated for non-life-threatening injuries and released.

Breath samples taken from the woman showed a blood alcohol content more than one-and-a-half times the legal limit.

She was arrested and will appear in court on Thursday to face charges.

» Brandon Sun

» CRIME STOPPERS

Search underway for suspects after more cars vandalized

The Brandon Police Service is seeking the public's assistance in solving another vehicle window smashing spree.

From the afternoon of May 7 until the morning hours of May 8, police were busy investigating ongoing reports of vehicle windows being smashed all across Brandon. More than 15 parked vehicles, including cars, trucks and vans, had side or rear windows randomly broken.

Police said no suspects, or suspect vehicles, were identified in this latest round of vehicle vandalism. In some cases,

vehicle owners were alerted to the damage by the sound of a loud "pop" or breaking glass, but the method used to break the windows is unknown.

If you have any information about this or any other crime, you are asked to call Brandon Crime Stoppers at 727-TIPS (727-8477). Your call is not recorded and your identity will remain anonymous. Crime Stoppers will pay up to \$2,000 for information that leads to the solution of a crime.

WANTED BY POLICE
The Brandon Police Service

is seeking the public's assistance in locating Rayanin Winnifred Branth, who is wanted by police.

Branth, 25, is charged with possession of cocaine, fail to attend for identification work and fail to attend court.

Police report that on Jan. 20, a search warrant for drugs was executed on a residence in the 300-block of Eighth Street. As a result of that search, a female was charged with possession of cocaine.

After being arrested and later released, the suspect failed to report for identification



Rayanin Branth

work and court.

Three arrest warrants have been issued Branth.

If you have any information as to the whereabouts of this person or anyone else wanted by police, you are asked to call Brandon Crime Stoppers at 727-TIPS (727-8477). Crime Stoppers does not subscribe to Call Display. Your call is not recorded and your identity will remain anonymous. Crime Stoppers will pay up to \$2,000 for information that leads to the solution of a crime.

» Brandon Police Service