

Westbank Cemetery brought back to life



By Kelowna Capital News

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Two years ago, the Westbank Cemetery was described as devastating, depressing and neglected.

Now, flowers and trees line the walkways. Fresh cut grass makes the area seem more like a park than a gravel pit. And the upgrades haven't come at a cost to West Kelowna taxpayers.

"This is a beautiful place now," said District of West Kelowna Mayor Doug Findlater.

"As the trees and the vegetation matures, it's going to be really park-like."

Improving the Westbank Cemetery has been a goal of district chief administrative officer Jim Zaffino's for quite some time.

But it was a speech to council by Ingrid Laube, daughter of the late Leonard Crosby, that really kickstarted the cemetery's improvements.

Laube told councillors she was devastated the first time she visited the Westbank Cemetery to pay her respects.

Laube's thoughts, combined with one of the district's busiest public consultation sessions, confirmed the community's desire to clean up the cemetery.

Zaffino was previously in charge of the Penticton cemetery and saw an opportunity to beautify the Westbank Cemetery without charging taxpayers.

"There had to be an infusion of money," said Zaffino.

The district constructed columbariums and mausoleums—structures that hold urns and tombs—and began selling spaces in each of those structures.

"Usually we're averaging \$25,000 per year. We've already exceeded that by three times (this year)," said Zaffino, who added the rates for existing plots were not increased.

The additional revenue has allowed the district to improve the cemetery's landscape by adding more than 3,500 shrubs and trees.

According to Stacey Harding, parks and public works supervisor, at the current rate of sales, the cemetery's vacant full casket burial sites will be occupied by spring 2016.

The district's next step will be looking to improve an adjacent 8.2-acre piece of property known as Pine Grove, which should provide enough space for the next 20 to 25 years.

wpaterson@kelownacapnews.com

Twitter: [@PatersonWade](https://twitter.com/PatersonWade)

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