

Design

By Steve Cronin

Prayerful

Approach to

Design



Holy Sepulchre Cemetery has been an active part of the Catholic community in Rochester, New York, for nearly 150 years.

With more than 250,000 burials, it is one of the largest cemeteries in New York State. However, with the percentage of cremation interments growing rapidly in recent years, Lynn Sullivan knew the cemetery needed to respond to the change.

“We knew the cremation rate was on the rise. At the same time, our original cremation garden was getting close to being full. We knew we wanted more space, so we started looking around the cemetery and considering what we could do,” said Sullivan, CEO of the 332-acre Holy Sepulchre and nearby Ascension

Garden Cemetery.

In 2015, Sullivan contacted Grever & Ward Inc., landscape architects the cemetery has worked closely with before. The collaboration resulted in the Holy Rosary Cremation Garden, which, when fully developed, will provide capacity to inter 6,500 urns in five columbaria and ground spaces while also reflecting the faith of people using the cemetery. The project was dedicated in June 2017, and sales have already allowed the cemetery to recoup 43 percent of the development cost, Sullivan said.

“The response has been very positive, not only from people who are

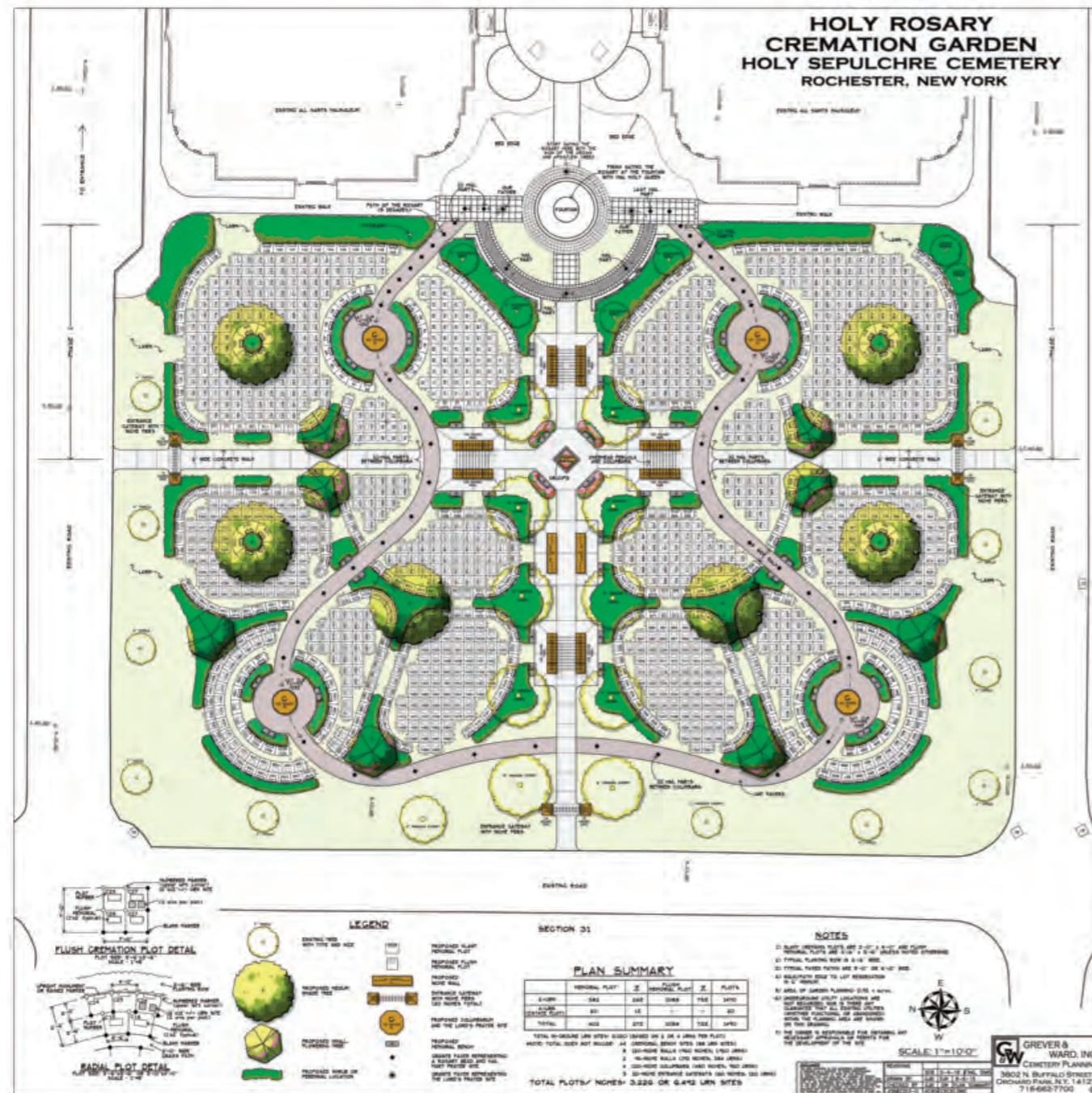
looking at this section, but also from people from other sections (of the cemetery) who will come and pray the rosary there and sit and reflect,” Sullivan said.

Sullivan credited Grever & Ward with not only coming up with a theme that resonates with families but also with designing a project that fits the cemetery’s existing design and takes advantage of the area’s natural landscaping.

“They think outside the box, and they take the time to understand the landscape and listen to our team about what plantings will or not work in the cemetery,” she said.



Above: An existing fountain at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester, New York, serves as the entrance area to the Holy Rosary Cremation Garden. Left: The garden’s design is based on the rosary, with diamond-shaped paver insets, left, and columbaria serving as places for the faithful to stop and pray. (Photos courtesy of Grever & Ward Inc.)



The existing mausoleum, fountain and row of trees, above, can be seen at the top of the design drawing for the Holy Rosary Cremation Garden, opposite page. The garden area had originally been set aside as the location for a future expansion of the mausoleum. (Photos courtesy of Grever & Ward Inc.)

The adoption of the rosary theme, and the cemetery operator's willingness to embrace a large cremation project, were keys to designing the garden, said Dave Ward, president of Grever & Ward.

"They had previously had some smaller cremation gardens and columbaria. They were nothing of the magnitude of this project, but they showed (cremation) was accepted and there was interest," Ward said.

Holy Sepulchre conducts about

1,500 interments annually, according to Sullivan. In the past five years, the percentage of cremation interments has risen from about 25 percent to approximately 38 percent, she said.

The Holy Rosary Cremation Garden is located on about an acre of land originally slated for the expansion of an existing mausoleum. The design incorporated an existing courtyard and fountain that serve as the starting point for those saying the rosary. Pathways are marked with diamond-

shaped insets to indicate where the faithful should say the "Hail Mary." Each of the columbaria, named Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Holy Cross, serve as the starting points of each decade of the rosary and contain 120 double-urn niches.

Two of four sections for in-ground double-urn interment spaces have been developed. Demand will determine when the remaining sections are developed. Future development will also include pergola walls and gateway

piers that will also contain double urn niches.

Although most cemeteries prefer to develop large projects in phases, Holy Sepulchre chose to install all of the five columbaria at one time.

"It was an unusual project since you couldn't really phase in the rosary part," Ward said.

While upstate New York is noted for its mountainous terrain, the cemetery is located on a sandy, flat lake plain. The rosary theme helped designers add visual interest to the project.

"When you don't have terrain elements, you have to do a little more planning to create interest. The curved walkways helped create interest," Ward said.

The rosary theme also helped Sullivan meet one goal she brings to any development project at Holy Sepulchre.

"One of the things we look for are things that encourage people to visit and things that bring peace to our visitors. We thought this would bring peace to people as they walk

and say the rosary," she said.

The cemetery presented blessed rosaries to people who attended the dedication ceremony and continues to give rosaries to visitors who stop at the office.

"We have handed out close to 600 rosaries. That doesn't mean we have had 600 sales, but that isn't why we are doing it. We want to encourage people to come and pray the rosary there and let them know it's meant to be a spot for anybody to visit," Sullivan said.



The Holy Cross columbarium, above, is one of five included in the garden and contains 120 double-urn niche spaces. The garden, opposite page, was dedicated during a June 2017 ceremony. (Photos courtesy of Grever & Ward Inc.)



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The cemetery has installed benches to encourage people to sit, enjoy the space and engage in quiet contemplation. While people can memorialize a loved one on the bench, the structures do not contain niches – a decision cemetery operators based on maintenance considerations, Sullivan said.

While there had been discussion about whether or not construction of the five columbaria should be done in phases, the decision to install all five at once proved to be the right choice, Sullivan said.

“We decided to open them all up because we felt that the different names would appeal to different people,” she said. The Holy Cross columbarium, located in the center of the garden and surmounted by a large stone cross, is the most popular of the five.

When designing the garden, Grever & Ward incorporated flowering trees already on-site into the plan. Landscaping around the columbaria allows cemetery staff to install seasonal plantings that ensure the garden is attractive and welcoming throughout the year.

“The big thing for us is making sure we are encouraging families to visit. We want to make sure the cemetery is beautiful and peaceful and not dark and gloomy,” Sullivan said. •

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