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Plans for cemetery don't fit

By Robin Blanchard
Friday, November 21, 2008

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Back in the early 1900s, they called themselves the 40 cousins. There were actually many more but they stopped counting after awhile. They were my great-grandparents, my great-great-grandparents, my aunts, uncles and cousins.

Many of them are buried at St. Mary's cemetery, what many of you would refer to as "Cemetery Park." I would like to honor them by fighting to restore the cemetery to what it was meant to be, a cemetery.

I grew up hearing about the 40 cousins from my grandmother at our home on Poli Street in Ventura. The 40 cousins were all interrelated by marriage. Some of the names may be familiar to you, Sheridan, Comstock, Orr, Arneill, Camarillo, Menchaca, Willoughby and Newby. Please forgive me if I've left anyone out.

The 1964 Ventura Star-Free Press called them a loose collection of political amateurs and a very potent force of the 1900s.

They owned the early newspapers in Ventura, ran the Pioneer Museum, promoted the Rincon Road and pushed through the building of the Maricopa Highway, the Ventura bridge and the county courthouse. They made Ventura's history and they wrote Ventura's history.

My ancestors are not any more important than yours, but I can't believe that anyone who has relatives buried at the cemetery would condone the continued use of the cemetery as a dog park.

And to city officials, I don't understand who you think you are trying to appease by spending hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars for improvements for what would essentially amount to a very expensive toilet for dogs. If you make these proposed changes, the cemetery must be fenced.

What a waste of money. One day, my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be right back here fighting for restoration of the cemetery again. My family has lived in Ventura for more than 200 years and we are not going to go away.

Attendance at Wednesday night's presentation of the proposed plans for the park was divided into two camps as usual. The neighbors who feel that they own the "park" and those of us with ancestors buried at the cemetery. Everyone was allowed a turn to speak on their feelings but way too much time was spent showing the proposed improvement plan, again, at the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting. After all is said and done, it is not a park, it's a cemetery.

— Robin Blanchard lives in Ventura.

It is not a park, it's a cemetery.

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