

# CEMETERIES: A different type of landscaping

A feeling of comfort is the aim of memorial park superintendents. That means attention to fine details, like well-manicured headstones and trees.

## OAKWOOD MEMORIAL GARDENS



Jack Sloane

Time marches on. Archibald Stadium in Syracuse, N.Y.—where football greats Jim Brown, Ernie Davis, Jim Nance, Floyd Little, and Larry Csonka used to romp—has been razed. The Carrier Dome has been “raised” in its place.

And literally in the shadow of the new dome lies Oakwood Memorial Gardens, where president Jack Sloane realizes that time, indeed, marches on.

Sloane, a 40-year cemetery veteran, will soon take with him the halcyon memories of sunny autumn Saturdays and Ben Schwartzwalder's Syracuse University football teams. In two months, he's turning operations of Oakwood Memorial Gardens over to son Greg.

Sloane's face crinkles with a smile and his eyes light up remembering the Orangemen. “Friends would always ask to park at the cemetery so they could walk to games. So I saw most of the games, because somebody always had extra tickets in exchange for a good parking spot.”

Oakwood has the longer history (Oakwood was established in 1859, the university in 1870). And the cemetery's 200 acres sport 300 varieties of trees and shrubs, including a medisequoia tree whose seed came from Tibet and an out-of-place bald cypress which is normally indigenous to semi-tropical areas.

“The State University of New York (SUNY) College of Environmental Sciences uses our cemetery for teaching,” says Sloane. “One year, they found gypsy moths and they had the state come in and spray for us.”

Maintenance of the cemetery landscape is not easy, mostly because of vertical markers but also because of trees, shrubs, and rolling hills.

“One year, a mower salesman told me his machine could mow anywhere. I told him to try one of our hills, so he brought his mower out. I never heard from him again,” Sloane remembers, the smile returning.



Tulip-lovers would appreciate Oakwood's landscape, where 2,500 tulips make their annual spring appearance.

Another problem is the soil: clay over shale that drains well but is so hard that very little grows well.

Oakwood maintenance crews man seven Excel Hustlers and one new Ferris Co. (Onieda, N.Y.) 60-inch riding mower. Twenty-one-inch Lawn Boy push mowers and plenty of string trimmers are also used by the eight-person summer crew.

Though Sloane hasn't used pesticides in the past, they have been implemented recently.

“We've started a program for weed control,” he observes. “We had a company fertilize and spray 2,4-D this spring.

“We're also going to try some grass retardants on some of the older hillsides.

“The last three or four years, too, we've been using Roundup around the vertical markers,” Sloane adds. “We have kids with sprayers following our trimmers.”

Because of its reputation, Oakwood always displays plenty of flowers. “This year, we've planted more than 2,500 geraniums, 500 narcissuses, 2,500 tulips, and \$1,000 worth of petunias and marigolds,” Greg notes.

The 40 years working for cemeteries (33 at Oakwood) have been good to the elder Sloane. He's met many notables, including Eleanor Roosevelt, who attended her son-in-law's funeral at Oakwood. Jack has also been president of the New York State Cemetery Association (1966) and the Syracuse Kiwanis (1967). He is current president of the New York State Turfgrass Association.

“I've enjoyed every bit of my career,” he concludes, wistfully looking out his office window to the cemetery's landscape. “The nice thing is that you meet a lot of people and you're not tied down to a desk.”

*continued on page 41*