

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

### ROSE HILLS

Oakwood's 600 burials a year pale in comparison to Rose Hills Memorial Park, which conducts about 30 services a day. Rose Hills is one of the largest—if not the largest—cemeteries in the country with 400 acres of lawn, 2,400 undeveloped acres and 20 entrances. The Whittier, Calif., cemetery has enough acreage to last another 175 years.

"John Gregg, the founder, used to tell us he had a dream," says gardening foreman Joe Hernandez. "He wanted to make this the biggest mortuary in the country."

Gregg passed away in 1959, but his dream lives on. Rose Hills conducted its 200,000th burial last fall.

"I enjoy the job," notes Hernandez, who has been at Rose Hills since 1958. "This is an entirely different ballgame than most landscape management. You have to be very careful what you say to the public and you have to be a little more respectful.

"People who come here are in a different frame of mind; they're not here for fun. But you get used to it like anything else."

The rose garden for which the cemetery is named contains 7,000 flowers. In addition, each of four churches have gardens, there is a Japanese garden and a garden at the Memorial Chapel.

"Roses do real well here," Hernandez observes. "But in April and May, it occasionally gets overcast and we have to fight mildew; in July and August we're fighting mites."

Most of the landscape is bermudagrass and kikuyugrass, though some poa annua exists. Grass is cut at 1¼ inches. The kikuyu gives Hernandez headaches.

"We tried to kill it out with Roundup," he says. "It seems like you burn the area out, but the darn stuff comes back."

Trimec and Mecomec are also Hernandez favorites. They are used for clover control. "I try and stay away from the stuff you need a permit for," he says.

Dallisgrass used to be a problem, but no more. "We were the first to use MSMA 20 years ago," remembers Hernandez, "but now we find that Roundup is just as good."

Rose Hills employs 20 landscape



Above, the Rose Hills mausoleum, which features one of four gardens on the 400 acres of lawn. There are 2,400 undeveloped acres and 20 entrances at the Whittier, Calif., cemetery.

For 28 years, Joe Hernandez has roamed the almost 3,000 acres at Rose Hills cemetery.

maintenance personnel, including regular crews for gopher control, tree maintenance, rose garden maintenance, and hand watering. ("Most of my boys have been here more than 20 years," he says. "My lead man has been here 30 years.") An additional 60 contracted workers of United Park Services help care for the cemetery's landscape.

Before contracting landscape maintenance to United Park Services, Rose Hills used seven-gang mowers. Now, it's strictly a few Locke walk-behinds and 30-inch Promasters, plus some 3-hp hand edgers and Weed Eater string trimmers.

Hernandez began as a temporary gardener/mower at the cemetery.

"I figured the Army was going to catch me," he recalls. "But my wife caught me first."

Mary Helen, his bride of 28 years, saw a career for her new husband. She visited Fullerton Junior College and registered Joe for horticulture courses. "I took the entrance exam and enrolled," Joe says. "Once I took the identification course, I really got interested. It snowballed. I went to night classes for 13 years, two nights a week."

His favorite task is visiting nurseries to buy specimens.

"I'm on the freeway a lot," he admits. "I look for plants ahead of time and like to spread my business around."

—Jerry Roche