



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Each year in U.S. cemeteries, we bury 827,060 gallons of embalming fluid, which includes formaldehyde; 180,544,000 pounds of steel; 5,400,000 pounds of copper and bronze; and 30 million board feet of hardwoods, including tropical woods. . . . Cemeteries turn beautiful places into a monoculture of gravestones—really a landfill of embalming chemicals and cement. Then backhoes, lawnmowers, and tree pruners put diesel emissions into the air and pesticides and fertilizers into the water.

(Mary Woodsen, quoted in *Real Money*, July/August 2003.)

Modern burial practices are an ecological disaster, pouring toxins and non-biodegradable metals and concrete into the earth. Cremation, which dumps more than 100 pounds of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere for each body and uses large amounts of fuel to maintain the 850° C temperature for more than an hour, is better but still polluting. The “green” approach, practiced in this country for centuries before “modern” funeral practices took hold, is the truly traditional approach to burial: interment without embalming in a simple pine box or shroud in a shallow woodland grave, marked by only a simple fieldstone or favorite plant.

Green Burial Pittsburgh, Inc. (GBP) (www.greenburialpittsburgh.org) is a nonprofit organization formed in 2008 to promote the green burial option in the Western Pennsylvania region and, more specifically, to establish a conservation burial ground in Allegheny County. There are only about 20 green cemeteries in the U.S. and none in Pennsylvania. While the United Kingdom has opened more than 200 green cemeteries, the first one in the U.S. did not open until 1998, in South Carolina. The closest one to Pittsburgh is in Marmot, Ohio, two and a half hours away.

The U.S. Green Burial Council (www.greenburialcouncil.org) identifies two types of green burial grounds: “natural burial grounds,” often a section of an existing cemetery set apart as a ‘green only’ area, and “conservation burial grounds,” developed in partnership with a land trust, using a conservation easement to protect land from development, and devoting a portion of the income from green burial to fund land conservation. Pittsburgh’s conservation burial ground would be the first of its type to be located near a major metropolitan area anywhere in the U.S.

Over the last year, GBP has been building capacity, and many professionals have offered *pro bono* services to help with start-up. These include three attorneys, a cemetery consultant, five funeral directors, a restoration ecologist, a nonprofit CPA, an information sciences professor at the University of Pittsburgh, a retired archeologist, a former executive director of an environmental organization, and about a dozen others. GBP also has established a fiscal sponsorship relationship with the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Pennsylvania, an IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Two local landowners have approached GBP about the possibility of using their land for a conservation burial ground, and doubtless more will self-identify as our publicity efforts grow. However, we need to build our funding base and solve several legal and zoning issues before we can pursue these offers. Furthermore, conservation easements are costly. Preliminary estimates range from \$250,000 to \$350,000 for start-up and first year operating expenses if the land is donated, more if the land must be purchased.

GBP is convinced that after start-up costs are met and the project becomes operational, it will become self-sustaining through the revenue from the sale of plots. With minimal outreach to date, interest has been high, and Allegheny County offers four unique market niche opportunities which will enhance the cemetery's prospects: 1) a large population base, 2) the second highest over-65 population (after Dade County, FL), 3) declines in population and agricultural land use opening more and more land for conservation, and 4) a regional focus on 'green' growth.

For these reasons, Green Burial Pittsburgh is seeking funding for a national demonstration project to establish here in Allegheny County the first successful conservation burial ground near a major metropolitan area in the U.S.

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Pete is the founder and president of Green Burial Pittsburgh, Inc., which he started in January 2008. His for-profit background includes starting one new business for PPG Industries, Inc., two new businesses for Menasha Corporation, Inc. and running his own export sales business. Pete is currently on the boards of The Council on Realizing Excellence in Management, The Funeral Consumers Alliance of Western Pennsylvania and The Spring Hill Civic League. Previously he served on the boards of Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network, Black and White Reunion and several churches. Pete has also been a volunteer worker for many other nonprofit organizations.