

# Conservationist finds NICHE in cemeteries

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**BY EILEEN GRAHAM**

For the Patriot-News

Looking out from the Upper Bermudian Cemetery, Adam Lobaugh, 82, can see the homes of his kin among the rolling Adams County hills. "My brother, Guy, lives up there," he says. "I live up at the next place," he adds and rattles off the names of nephews and a niece nearby.

Lobaugh is cemetery director and second-oldest member of the Upper Bermudian Lutheran Church. The church, also known as Ground Oak, was established next to the graveyard in 1782.

Recently, the church's board of directors hired Robert Mosko of Hanover, a cemetery conservationist, and his assistant, Mike Jacoby, to conserve and restore the gravestones and monuments.

"I love history," said Mosko, a former paramedic, who went on an Internet search for a niche-market career that would capitalize on an unmet need and allow him to launch his own business. Among the oldest cemeteries he's worked on are Lower Marsh Creek, Gettysburg and Silver Spring Presbyterian, Mechanicsburg.

Many things deteriorate graveyards, but Mosko says soil erosion is responsible for most damage to older sites. Burial vaults were not used much until the 1930s, he explains. When simple wooden caskets rotted, the earth often shifted and settled, and the subsidence was exacerbated by freezing and thawing. Markers shifted along with the soil and, depending on their composition, were further damaged by such things as air pollution, acid rain and tree sap. Marble, a common gravestone material, is high in calcium; as the calcium neutralizes acids, it softens and deteriorates.

To better explain his craft, the young man draws me to the old gravestones. "Anything leaning more than 7 degrees is unstable," he offers, noting that several projects he's worked on were due to injuries to children visiting the cemeteries. Sunken, broken, crushed or falling gravestones also must be conserved.

"Cemetery conservation is taking the least aggressive, least invasive (measures) where it's appropriate for the stone's condition," he says, disturbing the soil as little as possible. Mosko and his helpers brace and remove the stones from the soil, many of which have sunken so low the epitaphs are no longer visible. They then dig a relatively small hole, filling it with a cushion of brownstone gravel or granite and marble mini-chips to stabilize the gravestone. After the stone is reset, dirt is poured on the cushion and a small drainage ditch dug around it.

Mosko uses a mineral-based mortar for repairs and fills cracks with a lime-based grout.

Members of Upper Bermudian Church and the cemetery board have won his heart because of their interest in family history and willingness to work. To keep costs down, Mosko asked board members to volunteer their labor if he agreed to train them. Roger Sowers has been a constant, often leveling 20 to 30 of the least damaged stones a day.

As the workers fold their equipment and quit for the day, Lobaugh hovers about the cemetery, pointing out beautiful 18th-century markers, some carved in German on slate, which is remarkably preserved.

We walk up the hill to a newer section as he talks about the Breams, Aspers, Roudebushes and Millers buried here. "My wife was a Golden," he says pointing out a granite tombstone. He chuckles that on their first date, they took her parents to pick out the stone.