

**A BENCHMARK:  
RIDGEWOOD MEMORIAL PARK  
MILWAUKEE AVENUE,  
DES PLAINES  
ILLINOIS 60016  
ILLINOIS**



**A report by the Joint Christian Cemetery Company Limited by Guarantee  
Communications Department**



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## PART 1: About the Park

The Ridgewood memorial park located in Cook County, Illinois began its operations in the summer of 1927. Eighty one years later, the park has been the setting for over seventy-six thousand (76,000) interments as it continues to expand. This memorial park although making use of the “Dignity” brand, is just one of the several areas in which, **Service Corporation International (SCI)** delivers after death care services. Within a 15km radius of this memorial park, SCI delivers other after death care services, from the supply of head-stones, funeral parlors, carriage services amongst other things, all under their Dignity brand.



Illustration 1: Interments made in the 1950's

As at the time when inquiries for this report were made, the only person on ground at the Ridgewood Memorial Park office was a Family Service Counselor, Mr. Thomas Hertman. He was more than willing to give all the basic information about the park even though the questions were all impromptu. Having worked with SCI for over twelve years, Mr. Hertman was key in allowing us insights into a day in Ridgewood Memorial Park.



Illustration 2: Sign at the entrance. The small print reads; "We invite families to come to our cemetery offices to pick up a copy of our rules and regulations for Floral and Decorative guidelines {NP}Beginning spring 2005, Ridgewood's longstanding regulations and guidelines would be STRICTLY ENFORCED to better preserve the rights of lot owners and to preserve the beauty and standards of Ridgewood Cemetery and Mausoleum {NP}PLEASE ANTICIPATE THESE CHANGES ACCORDINGLY AND STOP BY THE CEMETERY OFFICE WITH ANY INQUIRIES {NP} Thank You"

Ridgewood Memorial Park is a totally secular facility and emphasis is laid on the importance of compassion and sensitivity to the various religious beliefs catered to by the memorial park. To this end, there is an Armenian section,

Greek orthodox section, Korean section, Jewish section and a Muslim section separated from the largely Christian interments although by hedges. A compromise particularly important to the Muslim and Jewish community leaders, who need the plots of their loved ones to be separated from those of other faiths.

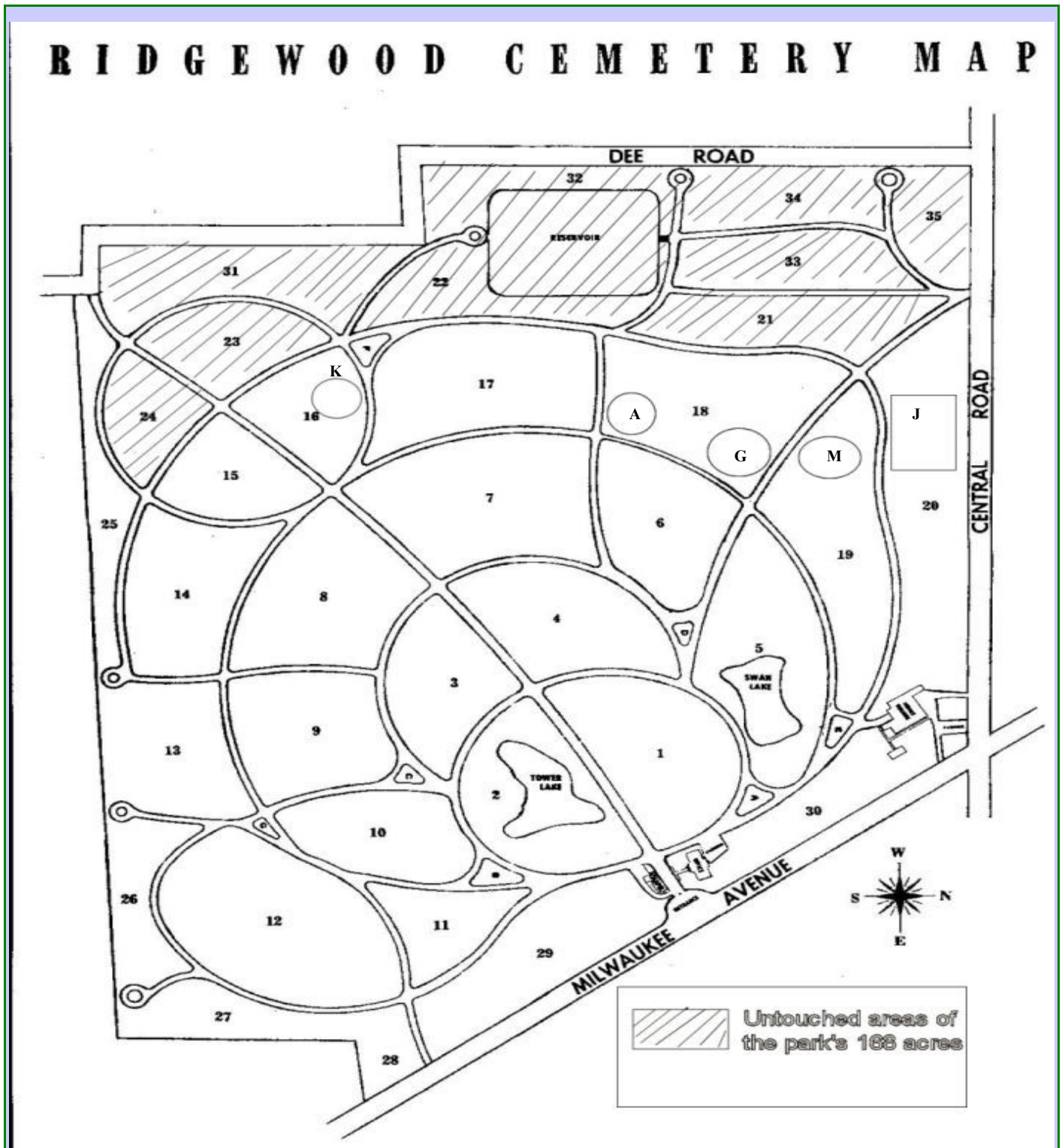


Illustration 3: A map of the entire extent of Ridgewood Memorial Park's 168 acres. K = Korean Section, A = Armenian Section, J = Jewish Section G = Greek Orthodox Section M = Muslim section



Illustration 4: The Ridgewood Memorial Parks main entrance



Hedge Separating the Muslim section from others

Illustration 5: The Muslim section

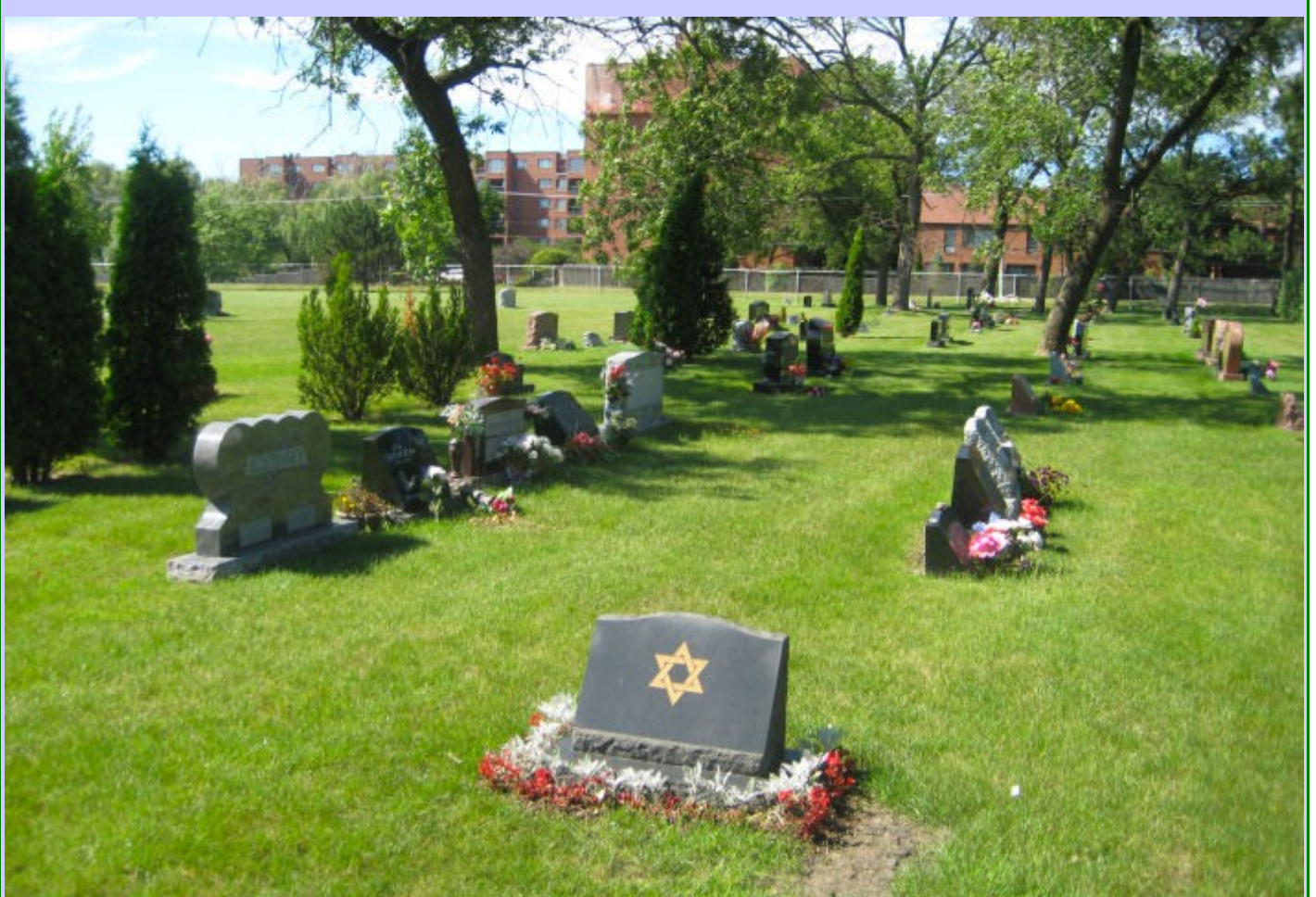


Illustration 6: The Jewish Section

The grounds in Ridgewood Memorial park apart from the grave plots, features two highly serene lake, the Swan Lake, Tower Lake, the main office that houses the



Illustration 7: Swan Lake Mausoleum

Chapel/Mausoleum/urn display/kitchen, the ground worker offices/storage with two other buildings for ground maintenance and landscaping workers. The entire 168 acres has two major entrances as seen in *Illustration 3*. The main entrance is on

Milwaukee avenue, while the service entrance for supply trucks and other service vehicles is on the corner of Milwaukee avenue and Central road.

SCI Corporation, owners of Ridgewood Memorial Parks have similar parks in all 51 states of the USA and a much smaller presence in Canada and New Zealand.



*Illustration 8: Swan Lake*



*Illustration 9: The Ridgewood Memorial Park main office, Mausoleum, Urn Display,, kitchen and Counseling center*



*Illustration 10: Chapel entrance*



*Illustration 11: Inside the Chapel, the podium has Swan Lake in the background*

## PART 2: Park Administration

The management and administration of Ridgewood Memorial Park is led by Mr.



*Illustration 12: Office hours*

Julian and he oversees the conduct of interments, supervises the landscaping contractors and the general maintenance of the grounds. A lot of his work is done on the grounds but in liaising with SCI central administration he is inevitably often off grounds as well. As General Manager, Julian is supported by the “Family Services Counselor” who is always on site to answer the questions of the memorial park's primary clientele – bereaved

people.



*Illustration 13: One of the parks administrative buildings*

### **PART 3: Park Maintenance**

The maintenance of Ridgewood Memorial Parks always green and lush lawns is carried out by a company called the Acres Group. Although the work of maintaining the parks beautiful landscape is contracted out already, the Park's general manager still has to supervise the work of the contractors. Deciding which trees need to be cut down and generally making sure that excellent service is delivered by contractors.

The design and build of the Park is also built for easy maintenance. From the onset,



*Illustration 14: underground drainage*

the park was built with a grid of underground pipes, which carries water across the entire 168 acres of the Memorial Park and means that at the touch of a button the entire park is watered in any weather. Underground drainage is also used across the parks with the majority of the water draining into the parks beautiful and iconic lakes. Thus while the Lakes play an important role aesthetically, they also play a

role in ensuring that the park is less subject to erosion and other negative results of flooding.

The work of maintaining the parks grounds continues day in day out and indeed there is a positive result. However, perfection is a tall order and pot holes yet to be mended were still found across the grounds. For the most part however, grounds maintenance was found to be impeccable; from the lawns, the lakes to the indoor publicly accessible areas. For drinking water, the indoor areas are fitted with a

couple of water fountains – connected directly to the main water supply.

Another area in which maintenance or lack of it could easily be ascertained is



*Illustration 15: The gents*

ideally in the toilets. The toilets particularly the ones open to the general public were in fairly good condition. The structure and facilities were standard as at the time of the impromptu examination. It definitely was not smelly or unkempt. An impression easily gotten was that with a bit more work it could be in perfect condition. The maintenance of the toilets is also contracted out to a cleaning agency as there is no staff

on ground for the cleaning of the restrooms.



*Illustration 16: A clean toilet at all times*



*Illustration 17: The road network, potholes: negligible?*



*Illustration 18: Another pothole*



*Illustration 19: Landscape maintenance: Contractors*



*Illustration 20: The maintenance and supply building, an exit is directly behind the building and suppliers usually drop their products here*

## PART 4: Park Policy

The cardinal rule in the park for its staff is that all bereaved people must be treated with maximum empathy – just as even the dead are very importantly treated with dignity. A small but probably poignant indicator of such empathy is easily observed in the fact that boxes of tissue papers are to be found virtually everywhere in the park. On every bench and next to every couch, it can easily be inferred that the staff of the memorial park do their utmost to ensure that the bereaved are left in peace and serenity to mourn their loved ones. Flowers are placed strategically across the park; paintings are of serene and calming scenes from nature. The flowers of course especially indoors are not all natural, most of them in fact are synthetic, yet their serene effect is still noticeable.

For visitors to the parks, the rules are clearly stated at the entrance (please see



*Illustration 21: A warning sign on the grounds*

Illustration 2). No fishing, no pets allowed, no driver training and generally no unruly behavior is tolerated within the park. Filming can only be carried out with permission from the main office. The entire property is fenced but the rules do not seem rigidly enforced. In one example (the writer was an eye witness), a

couple drove down to the spot where their loved one (presumably) was buried, and came out of the car with a dog, that ended up by the plot where they were going. The security and enforcement of Park rules is officially largely dependent on a synergy between the county Police department and private security department.

## PART 5: Observations

The primary observation lies in Ridgewood Memorial Parks ability, willingness and ingenuity in catering for various interment needs; from the Mausoleums, to the Urn displays and the ability to cater for so many very divergent sects. The emphasis on **empathy** is certainly something to be emulated.

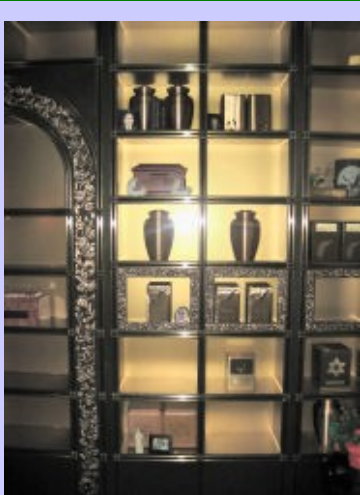


Illustration 22: Urn display

The lay out of the memorial park's plots and its un-uniformed headstones tends to radiate the aura of a cemetery. Although it is organized in a most non-threatening way, the serene nature of the park is enough to put anyone off picnicking in the park. This might be seen as an added benefit, since that would only pose higher costs in grounds cleaning.

The monuments in the park are not very striking. Most striking of all the aesthetic structures is probably the obelisk. Depending on a persons taste though, some of the over-ground vaults have a high aesthetic value and are all very well maintained.



Illustration 23: An aesthetic obelisk

Ridgewood memorial parks standards are rather high but not quite in a state of perfection. On a scale of 1/10, based on JCCC ideals, it would fall close to 7. Ridgewood's approach to welcoming different religious sects is very laudable and exemplary indeed. However, the costs of enforcement and maintaining standards would probably be higher in Nigeria as against any of the places that SCl operates its Dignity parks.

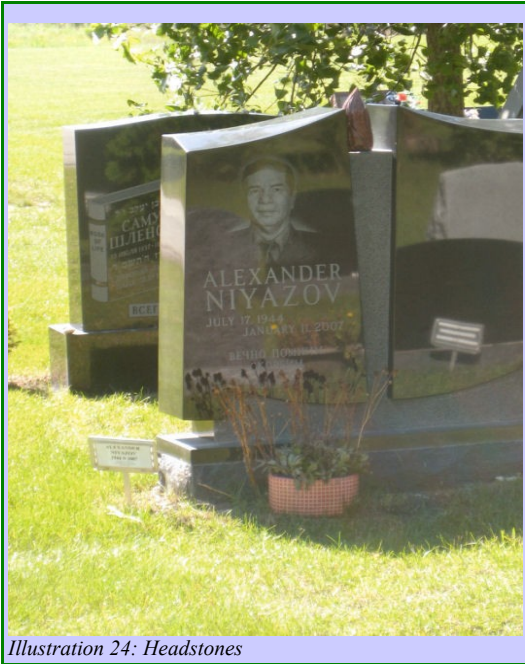


Illustration 24: Headstones

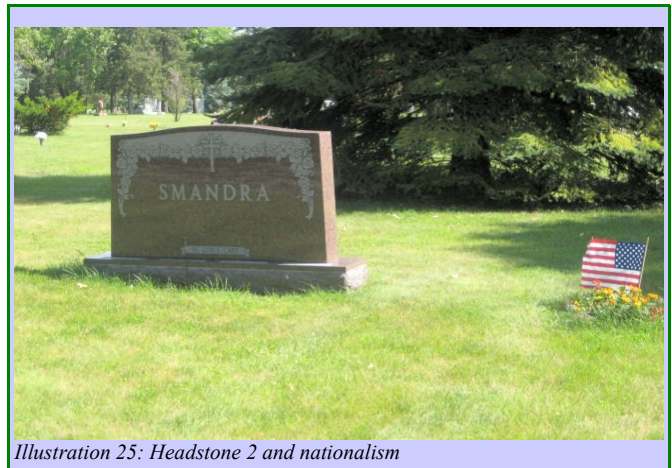


Illustration 25: Headstone 2 and nationalism



Illustration 27: Headstone 3

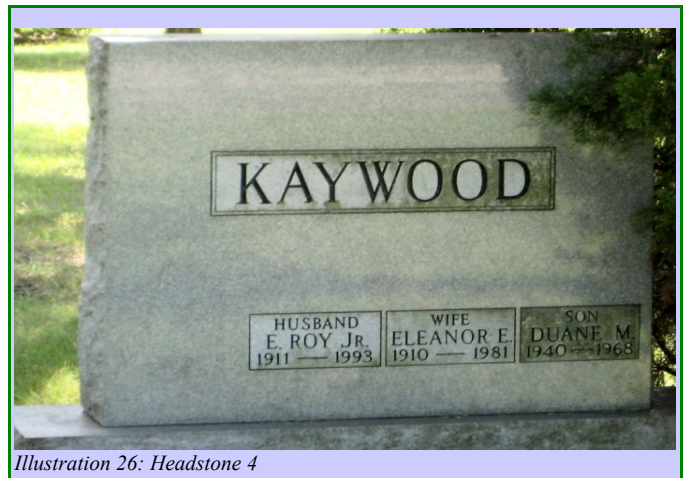


Illustration 26: Headstone 4

## **APPENDIX**

For more information please contact the Ridgewood Memorial Park main office.

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