

# AUBURN NEWS

## Virtual tour showcases Hillside Cemetery

By Sean Reid

News Staff Writer

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AUBURN — One could say Hillside Cemetery's virtual tour project was in purgatory this fall. When \$2,000 was approved for the endeavor at the Nov. 8 Special Town Meeting, the project became heavenly.

About a year and a half ago, the Rev. Kenneth Knox, chairman of the Cemetery Commission, looked to modernize the cemetery's mapping system from the existing index cards to computer files. The last update of the system took place in 1934, and most of the original index cards are still intact.

"We wanted to do this so it could be more efficient for people wanting to know where someone is buried or to find available lots," Knox said. "Now we can turn on the computer and find it in a few moments."

The final stage of the update project — which required the money approved by Town Meeting members — will encode the names on the graveyard's headstones on the computer map. The total cost for the project will be about \$8,000.

Knox said Robert Perry of topo**Graphix**, a cemetery mapping company based in New Hampshire, has performed the first stage of the mapping by snapping digital photos of the cemetery.

The complete map of Hillside Cemetery can be viewed on one printed page, in contrast to past maps and blueprints that were torn and tattered from age and time. The new map resembles Massachusetts without Cape Cod's elbow.

"I was amazed the first time I saw it," Knox noted. "I never thought that it looked that way."

Wayne Bloomquist, superintendent of Auburn's cemeteries, has been working with Perry to make sure the information collected, catalogued, and computerized is correct.

"This is going to make everyone's lives a lot easier," Bloomquist explained. "The old index cards have the information on each person and where they're buried. So [now] if someone calls from California and asks where a family member is buried, we just put in the disk and have the information for them in a short period of time.

If this wasn't updated, we'd have to tell that person that we'll call them back later on because it would take forever to get the information."

Knox said visitors will be able to take a virtual tour of the cemetery by inserting one disk on a laptop computer.

"With the help of topo**Graphix** taking digital pictures, people can see every section of the cemetery from every view," Knox noted. "It's quite astounding."

Knox said having the ability to view the cemetery through a virtual tour will benefit people interested in purchasing lots any time of year.

"The virtual tour was really a bonus for us," Knox noted. "What we wanted to do was make sure the mapping system was up to date. [Perry] needed it so we took it as well."

The reverend said the new system will be a welcomed addition for the Cemetery Commission.

"We do about 90 burials a year and about 16 to 56 cremations a year," Knox stated. "With our new mapping system, we will be able to figure out how to expand our sections to make it easier for everyone."

Bloomquist said he and the Cemetery Commission will keep the index cards and other outdated information close by, as a backup system.

"You never know what could happen," Bloomquist added. "So all of our disks are backed up so we're covered if anything should happen."

The superintendent said the information from the index cards was also placed into Microsoft Excel. Each file has the information on each lot concerning the square footage, when the person died, the owner of the lot, and the lot number. The next step for the commission could be expanding the new system online.

"Eventually, we hope to do that," Knox said. "But we haven't really gotten to far with that yet. Like everything, it costs money, so we'll have to wait on that. I'm happy with what we have now."