

BELL TOWER REOPENS / ROAD REDO / NEW VISITOR CENTER

The Gate

THE MAGAZINE OF HISTORIC OAKLAND FOUNDATION SUMMER 2023



**TREASURED
SPACES**

The Oakland Bell Tower
Before and after its top-to-bottom rehab



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MISSION

Historic Oakland Foundation partners with the City of Atlanta to preserve, restore, enhance, and share Oakland Cemetery with the public as an important cultural resource and island of tranquility in the heart of the city.

Historic Oakland Cemetery is a division of Atlanta's Department of Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs.

Images courtesy of Historic Oakland Foundation, w. scott chester photography, and Smith Dalia Architects.

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Opening the Gate

Big things are happening at Oakland Cemetery. It is an honor for Historic Oakland Foundation to play a central role in bringing so much life to Atlanta's oldest public green space and original cemetery.

At the ribbon cutting for the newly rehabilitated Oakland Bell Tower in November 2022, Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens said, "We have so many important Atlanta stories connected in these spaces. Oakland is such a big part of my vision of Atlanta as a city that is working to become the beloved community that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. envisioned for us all." We couldn't agree more. The completion of this historic project, as you'll read inside, provides much needed love and care for a historic treasure and makes the Bell Tower more accessible to all visitors to Oakland. "People who visit Oakland Cemetery will be able to see the past but also look out onto the present and future of the downtown skyline," Mayor Dickens concluded.

We're currently in a golden age of improvements to the city's oldest public green space. Within these pages you'll read about major upcoming road and infrastructure improvements and the imminent construction of a new Visitor Center for the Cemetery. These improvements are long overdue, vital to HOF's ongoing work to provide a world-class visitor experience for our more than 125,000 annual visitors, and critical to our ability to conduct ongoing restoration and preservation work inside the Cemetery.

Partnership is at Oakland Cemetery's core. Our work is made possible by hundreds of volunteers, a passionate board, great friends in the Department of Parks and Recreation (especially Cemetery Sexton Sam Reed and Parks Commissioner Justin Cutler), the City Council, the Mayor's Office, and generous individuals and foundations who appreciate Oakland's importance to this city.

We are so grateful to the tens of thousands of people who continually make possible our work to care for and share this special place.

In service to Oakland,

Richard J. W. Harker, Executive Director



Richard Harker
Executive Director



1899 Oakland Bell Tower Reopens After Rehabilitation

BUILDING BECOMES NEW EVENT RENTAL SPACE

BY RICHARD HARKER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

About six months ago we completed a top-to-bottom rehabilitation of the 1899 Oakland Bell Tower, one of three main projects funded by our \$13.7 million *Living History* Capital Campaign. Before the rehabilitation, the 2,800 square-foot structure housed the sexton's office, Foundation offices, meeting space, archives, a gift shop, and storage, as well as the Cemetery's records, visitor center, and public restrooms. Space was tight, and the historic building was suffering from overuse.

The rehabilitation of the building by Smith Dalia Architects began in March 2021. Smith Dalia opened up the first and second

floors, repaired masonry, restored windows, replaced roofing, and updated plumbing, electrical, and mechanical services. The building

now features an elevator for greater accessibility.

The public can access the first floor of the Bell Tower, where they'll find an accessible restroom as well as interpretive panels describing the history of the building and of Oakland. Oakland Cemetery Sexton Sam Reed has relocated his office to the Bell Tower. The second floor of the building, with two porches offering sweeping views of the cemetery and of the Atlanta skyline, is available for private event rentals and meetings.



The Bell Tower's first floor features a public restroom and panels about the building's history.



The second floor features an exposed brick wall and access to two covered porches.



SEE IT

Take a 360-degree virtual tour of the Oakland Bell Tower. Go to oaklandcemetery.com/belltowertour or scan the QR code.



Bell Tower Porch, during tile restoration.



Bell Tower Porch, after tile restoration.

REPLACING MARBLE TILE

As part of the Bell Tower's rehabilitation process, the preservation team replaced and repaired damaged marble tile on the building's porch. Tiles that were damaged beyond repair were replaced with new tiles from the Georgia Marble Company in Tate. The Georgia Marble Company has been in operation for nearly 150 years and is thought to have been the source of the original tiles.

Ashley Shares, HOF's director of preservation, travelled to Tate and hand-selected a slab of marble from which the replacement tiles could be cut. Happily, much of the marble from the Tate quarries contains the distinctive "veining" that is seen in the original tiles.

The Oakland Bell Tower Before & After Rehab



The Bell Tower's upper level during construction.



The Bell Tower's upper level after completion.



The Bell Tower from the southeast, before.



The Bell Tower from the southeast, after.



The Bell Tower porch, during construction.



The Bell Tower porch, after construction.



ABOUT OAKLAND

Historic Oakland Cemetery is Atlanta's oldest public park and the final resting place of many of the city's most noted citizens. Less than a mile from downtown, its 48 acres are full of treasures — history and gardens, sculpture and architecture, ancient oaks and magnolias. It's a wedding venue, a green space, an art gallery, a classroom space, and a place to celebrate the city's rich and fascinating past and future.



OAKLAND BELL TOWER RIBBON CUTTING

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens presided over a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Bell Tower on November 16, 2022. Deputy Parks Commissioner Alvin Dodson, Councilmember Liliana Bakhtiari, Chair and President of The Imlay Foundation Mary Ellen Imlay, President and CEO of Invest Atlanta Dr. Eloisa Klementich, and Historic Oakland Foundation Executive Director Dr. Richard Harker delivered remarks.

The Oakland Bell Tower rehabilitation would not have been possible without the support of the The Imlay Foundation, Invest Atlanta, Dr. Jerry and Mrs. Vivian Gowitt, the Bruce Barfield Family, and the Atlanta Urban Design Commission.



Rendering of future Oakland Visitor Center interior.



Rendering of future Oakland Visitor Center exterior.

What the Oakland Visitor Center Construction Means for You

GROUNDBREAKING TO BEGIN SOON

BY NEALE NICKELS SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CAPITAL PROJECTS

Historic Oakland Foundation will soon be building its new Visitor Center, located right outside our main gate at 374 MLK Jr. Drive SE. We can't wait to share more details about the project, but for now, we wanted to give you an overview of what the building will be, who it's for, when and how it will be built, and what the impacts will be to our visitors.

First of all, it's good to remember why we're here: the now-rehabilitated Oakland Bell Tower served us faithfully for 46 years as our offices and gift shop, but the time came for us to grow into a bigger space better positioned to serve the organization and the community.

We worked with our partners at the Department of Parks and Recreation and Invest Atlanta to secure a few parcels west of our main gate which had served as parking areas for the cemetery for several years.

On this nearly two-acre piece of raw land, we'll create a new visitor

campus with enhanced parking including EV charging, new passive park space, and the building itself.

The approximately 10,000 square-foot building, designed by Smith Dalia Architects, will contain our enlarged gift shop, a large ball-room-style space for hosting educational programming and events, and the Foundation's offices.

We hope to break ground on the project midyear, and expect construction to take about two years. During that time, you can still visit Oakland and stop by our temporary visitor center and store located right outside the main gate.

New Visitor Center Will Feature Gardens, Plazas

Exterior spaces to focus on sustainability



Shaded paths outside the future Visitor Center will feature native plants.



Event lawn outside the future Oakland Cemetery Visitor Center.

In addition to a beautiful new building, our Visitor Center complex will feature outdoor plazas and gardens that will invite visitors to linger, enjoy a picnic, or rest a while before exploring Oakland.

A lawn and garden will complement the site's north side and create signature green space adorned with

a mixture of native plants and those commonly found inside Oakland, creating a tangible link between the spaces. Further reducing our environmental footprint, the site's landscape will include bioretention gardens that will divert a million gallons of rainwater each year from our city's stormwater infrastructure.

Over the coming months, we'll be sharing updates and photos of the Visitor Center construction process. Stay updated on our progress on our website's blog: oaklandcemetery.com/digging-deeper

Leave a Lasting Legacy



Memorialize a loved one, honor a friend, or simply acknowledge your family's valued support of Historic Oakland Foundation with an engraved brick that will be installed on a plaza outside the new Visitor Center's main entrance.

Learn more at oaklandcemetery.com/brick.

Oakland's Roads to Get Needed Redo

INFRASTRUCTURE BOND TO FUND ROAD REPAVING AND MORE

BY RICHARD HARKER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you've been to Oakland Cemetery lately, you may have noticed that its asphalt roads are in need of repair, with potholes and uneven gutters causing safety concerns for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles. That's about to change. In 2023 we are thrilled to work with the City of Atlanta to make major improvements to Oakland Cemetery's crumbling roads.

With over \$2.4 million from the 2022 Move Atlanta Forward infrastructure bond, the city will repave nearly two miles of roads at Oakland, replace failing water lines, and repair the historic gutters. This major accessibility improvement would not be possible without the support of our partners in the Department of Parks and Recreation and the City Council, in recognition of the Cemetery's importance as a vibrant place for visitors and neighbors alike.



Roadway issues like this will soon be history.

New Tech Will Help Visitors Navigate

NEW GIS MAP, DATABASE WILL HELP VISITORS EXPLORE OAKLAND AND ITS RESIDENTS

BY RICHARD HARKER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Oakland Cemetery's Jewish Flat and Jewish Hill.

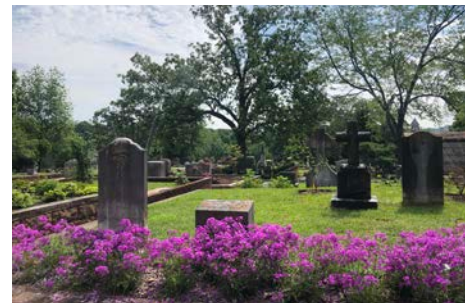
In 2023, the Foundation will launch a publicly accessible interactive Geographic Information System (GIS) map and searchable database. When you visit Oakland you'll be able to scan a QR code that will pull up an interactive map of the Cemetery and geolocate your position. This map will help you find specific burial sites at Oakland, amenities like restrooms, or the Oakland Bell Tower. It will also provide you with additional information about the Cemetery and its residents.

This five-year project has included the digitization of older records and a lot of data cleanup, and was made possible by the generous support of the Sara Giles Moore Foundation, which shares HOF's vision for a more accessible historic Oakland Cemetery.

Preservation, Gardens Teams Make Progress on East Hill

MORE THAN 54 BLOCKS COMPLETED SO FAR

BY ASHLEY SHARES DIRECTOR OF PRESERVATION



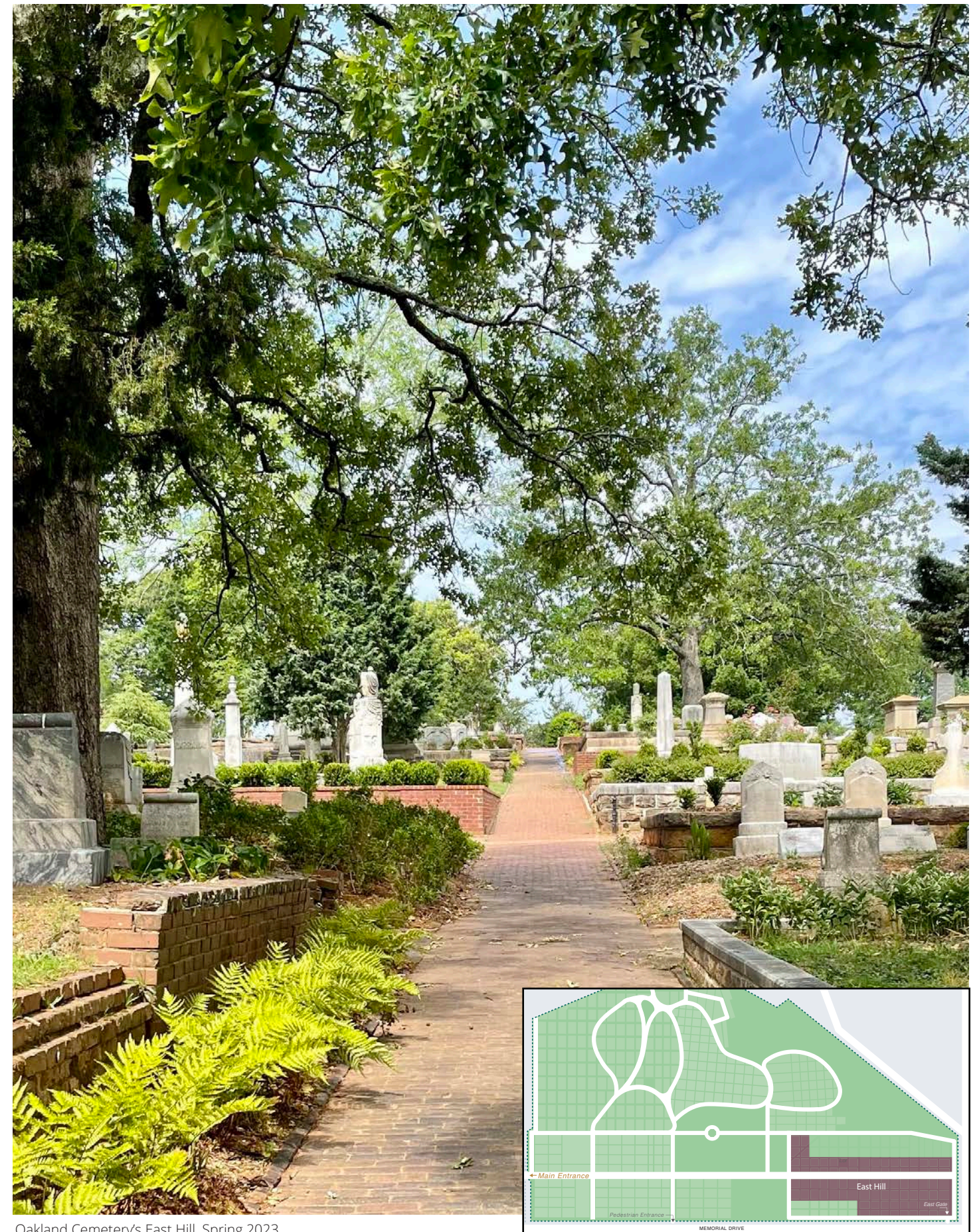
The preservation team will wrap up the current phase of their work on East Hill in early 2024! Since late 2019, they've worked almost exclusively in this section of the cemetery, but soon that phase of the restoration process will come to a close. For those less familiar with Oakland's neighborhoods, East Hill refers to the easternmost 7.5 acres of the cemetery, characterized by its steep terrain and large retaining walls. The work the preservation team is doing in this section is funded through HOF's *Living History* Capital Campaign—the same campaign that helped pay for the recent Bell Tower rehabilitation.

This spring, Leija and Sanchez once again served as our masonry contractors, rebuilding approximately \$250,000 worth of deteriorated retaining walls on East Hill. Our in-house team will also rebuild some smaller walls, but as usual, their primary focus will be on headstones and other very sensitive features.

EAST HILL BLOOMS AS GARDENS TEAM MOVES AHEAD

This spring has been a great time to see all the progress that has been made on our East Hill Landscape Rehabilitation Project! The flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, and bulbs are showing off spectacularly above the lush green carpet of sod and ground covers that have been added as part of our ongoing campaign to beautify this once-forgotten part of the Oakland landscape.

In 2022, Oakland's gardens team completed new landscapes on 16 blocks, bringing the total number of blocks completed on the eastern side of East Hill to 54 out of 118! This year we have begun to improve 20 more blocks on the western side of the hill, which we plan to complete before the end of 2023.



Oakland Cemetery's East Hill, Spring 2023.

HOF Launches Workforce Development Program

STUDENTS LEARN LANDSCAPE AND HARDSCAPE SKILLS

BY CHARVIS BUCKHOLTS DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND YOUTH PROGRAMMING



Historic Oakland Foundation has kicked off a new workforce development program, the Youth Landscape and Hardscape Team (YLHT). The six-week program, designed for metro-Atlanta students ages 15 to 18 who attend Title I high schools, provides steady paid summer employment, on-the-job training, and workplace skills coaching designed to prepare students for the adult workforce. Students gain occupational and leadership skills while caring for the landscapes and hardscapes of a historic site.

Working alongside HOF's gardens and preservation teams, team members learn landscaping and horticulture skills or preservation and masonry skills while paired with mentors in their primary field of interest. Through partner organizations in each field, team members will also learn about career pathways in these fields.

Students who successfully complete the program will be invited to apply to the YLHT Leadership Track, a summer program where they will learn supervisory and leadership skills, project management, and small business fundamentals while co-managing a first-year YLHT cohort.

We can think of no better place in our city for the participants in this program to learn the skills associated with landscape and hardscape care than at historic Oakland Cemetery. We hope that this program marks the beginning of an extended partnership with these students, their families, and their schools.

The inaugural cohort began work on June 5 and will complete their program on July 15.

Day of the Dead

A Look Back at Oakland's First-Ever Día de Muertos Celebration

On November 6, 2022, we welcomed approximately 10,000 visitors to the Cemetery to celebrate a traditional Day of the Dead festival. Oakland's newest signature event was presented in partnership with the Consulate General of Mexico in Atlanta and the Institute of Mexican Culture.

Visitors of all ages enjoyed traditional dancing, crafts, authentic Mexican food, and entertainment that included a Catrinas and Catrines costume contest for kids and adults.

 **ATTENDANCE**
10,000



FEBRUARY 12, 2023

Love Stories

Love Stories, our Valentine's Day tradition, returned for 2023. Guests enjoyed sweet treats before a tour recounting the loves of Atlantans of days past.

 **Attendance** 270
 **Revenue** \$4,000



APRIL 15, 2023

Spring Plant Sale

Oakland's popular spring plant sale drew gardeners from around Atlanta to its new location in Magnolia Square.

 **Plants Sold** 800+
 **Revenue** \$60,000



APRIL 27 - MAY 7, 2023

Illumine

Oakland's magnificent arboretum was spotlighted at this year's event. Crowds enjoyed live music, artistic installations by local artists, and innovative lighting displays.

 **Attendance** 6,000+
 **Revenue** \$210,000+

See our full calendar at oaklandcemetery.com/calendar.



Donor Spotlight

Mary Lynn Hemphill & Robert Brown

“Oakland Cemetery has provided us inspiration through our volunteer experience there. We make new friends, acquire new knowledge, have a place on a team, enjoy respite in a peaceful urban sanctuary, enjoy a sense of living history (kinda funny for a cemetery), feel connection with nature as well as our city and to people dead and alive. Experiencing Oakland never fails to remind us that we have a limited time on this side of the dirt. We appreciate that Historic Oakland Foundation practices conscious stewardship of financial and energetic gifts. We look forward to a long and deepening relationship with this Atlanta treasure.”

Volunteer Voices

Phillip Cheng

By day, Phillip Cheng is the director of electrical engineering at a manufacturing startup. But on event nights, he volunteers with the logistics team to bring the cemetery to life. Phillip’s passion for tinkering with electronics makes him an invaluable asset for working with the electrical, lighting, and audio systems at events like *Illumine* and the *Capturing the Spirit of Oakland* Halloween tours.

Phillip started off as a “caboose” on tours. But as HOF staff learned of Phillip’s electrical engineering expertise, he was asked to work on the more technical aspects of our events. You probably won’t see Phillip since he works behind the scenes, but without his help, it would be hard to see at all!

Phillip loves the Foundation’s focus on diversity and inclusion. He feels that each staff member and volunteer brings something new and different to the table, working to preserve this historic green space in an otherwise bustling city.



Become a Part of Oakland

VOLUNTEER

Work in the gardens, give tours, staff the Visitor Center, or help out at special events! Oakland volunteers never fail to amaze with their passion and commitment, and we’d love to have you.

oaklandcemetery.com/volunteer

MEMBERSHIP

Preserve Atlanta’s past and celebrate its present by becoming a member or renewing your membership.

oaklandcemetery.com/membership

DONATE

Preserve and restore Oakland for generations to come.

oaklandcemetery.com/donate



Sara with former President Jimmy Carter and Mrs. Carter at Oakland Cemetery, January 2019.



Longtime Director of Gardens Retires

SARA HENDERSON LEAVES A GREEN LEGACY AT OAKLAND

BY NEALE NICKELS SENIOR DIRECTOR OF CAPITAL PROJECTS

Raise your hand if you’ve ever strolled around Oakland Cemetery and thought, “My goodness, these gardens are stunning!” You probably noted the care with which the grounds are tended, and felt good knowing that the final resting place of your ancestors and so many of Atlanta’s pioneers have been in such great hands. If you’ve been visiting Oakland for the last 15 or so years, you’ve seen the gardens evolve and grow, not just seasonally, but also into new areas of the cemetery that had yet to be restored. By the end of 2024, HOF’s preservation and gardens teams will have preserved and begun caring for nearly 20 acres of the cemetery’s plots, each one treated like its own unique garden. Though she would never claim credit for it, the person responsible for leading this transformation is our dear Sara Henderson.

Sara came to Oakland first as a board member of the Foundation around 2006. Known for her skill and knowledge of southern gardens, Sara’s wisdom was the right thing at the right time for HOF. She worked with fellow board and committee members to consider the future of the gardens and established guidelines for their design and care. After several years, it became clear that HOF needed Sara’s leadership on a

more regular basis, and she was hired on as director of gardens. According to now-Emeritus Director David Moore, Sara “helped lift landscape up to a more prominent, valued, and appreciated element of Oakland.” Sara’s gift to Oakland was her ability to balance appropriate and authentic site design with context clues from the hardscape features and with sympathy for families, whether known or unknown to us. HOF’s Executive Director Richard Harker notes, “I admire how thoughtful and detailed her design was and how she really tried to think about the families as well as the history.”

Sara also established Oakland’s plant sales as a fundraiser for the gardens. What began as a way to make a little extra money has grown into a serious revenue generator that many gardening enthusiasts and community members look forward to each year.

Sara impacted much more than the gardens in her time at Oakland. As her team notes, she built the gardens from nothing, and that includes forming the talented team of horticulturists we’re fortunate to have today. Her colleagues know Sara as a larger-than-life character, an excellent plantswoman, a detail-oriented designer, a fine gardener, and a great friend. The gardens at Oakland Cemetery, without a doubt, would not be where they are without the blessing of Sara’s leadership. Cheers to the “founder of the gardens” and best wishes in your retirement, Sara! We all look forward to seeing you back at Oakland as often as we can.



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Upcoming Events for 2023

September 24

SUNDAY IN THE PARK

Oakland's longest-running event returns for its 45th year, combined with our annual Tunes from the Tombs music festival. Spend the day at Oakland enjoying fabulous live music, local craft beer, tours of the cemetery, an artist's market, costume contest, kids' entertainment, and more! Tickets are on sale now.

October 7 & 8

PUMPKIN PATCH

Celebrate the season with fun for the whole family at Oakland's Pumpkin Patch! Choose from a variety of pumpkins and enjoy seasonally decorated photo ops, family-friendly activities in our kids' area, a mini scavenger hunt, snacks and drinks for purchase, and a Museum Store pop-up shop with curated seasonal items and Oakland merchandise.

October 19-29

CAPTURING THE SPIRIT OF OAKLAND

Oakland Cemetery's popular Halloween tours return for their 17th season this October. Tickets go on sale to our members on July 1 and to the general public on July 15.

See our full calendar at oaklandcemetery.com/calendar.