

Former police officer takes care of Hobart Cemetery

BY JUSTIN POST

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HOBART | Richard Hammersmith finds life in death.

Whether adjusting headstones or comforting a grieving husband or wife, the former city police sergeant said his job as Hobart Cemetery caretaker is a labor of love.

"I love this place," he said one recent morning while brushing a clump of fresh snow from a headstone. "It's my home away from home. There is just so much history here."

Hammersmith, 57, first visited the cemetery in 1999 when his mother-in-law, Jean Smith, died. He said he was disturbed to find overgrown grass and crooked headstones in a place where he expected to find comfort in his surroundings.

"It was terrible," he said. "If you're going to take care of a place like this, you have to show it some respect. They may be dead and gone, but they still deserve some

respect."

Hammersmith went to Hobart Mayor Linda Buzinec to express his concerns and asked whether he and his son-in-law, Chris Wagner, could take care of the place as a part-time job during summer months.

With the city's approval, Hammersmith set out with a push mower and began chipping away at a lengthy chore list. About \$10,000 alone was spent on trimming and pruning the hulking trees dotting the 7-acre cemetery.

He also replaced decrepit concrete at the front of the cemetery with blocks and has replaced equipment used to maintain the property.

Hammersmith, who works as an officer at the Indiana University Northwest campus, volunteers at the cemetery during winter months.

Not all the work is manual labor, however.

"This isn't about just coming in here and cutting the grass and trimming," he said. "This is about helping the people who come here."