

Hartsdale Pet Cemetery ranks with the Taj Mahal

BY MARCELA ROJAS • THE JOURNAL NEWS • NOVEMBER 17, 2008

HARTSDALE - Their tombstones share glimpses of tender years spent serving as beloved companions and loyal kin.

"The little-stand in brother who mended a broken heart," reads the gray headstone for Raffles, who lived from 1936 to 1953.

"For all the faithful years of love and happiness you gave," reads another.

"There's so many stories here," said Hartsdale Pet Cemetery director Ed Martin as he stood on the hillside of this 112-yearold burial ground.

Indeed, its rich human-to-animal history may have been the reason the graveyard was listed, along with the Taj Mahal in India and Egypt's Pyramids of Giza, as one of the top 10 cemeteries in the world.

Lonely Planet, a publishing company that puts out travel guidebooks, recently gave the distinction for its "Best in Travel 2009" to the Hartsdale Pet Cemetery. Other final resting sites on the "10 best places to die for" list include the Catacombs of Rome and the Pere Lachaise in Paris, France where Doors' musician Jim Morrison and writers Oscar Wilde and Marcel Proust are buried. "We're honored to be in that company," Martin said. "No one has to come here and bury their pet. It's something that is really a pure act of love."

The Hartsdale Pet Cemetery was started in 1896, when Dr. Samuel Johnson, a veterinarian, offered to let a bereaved client, who didn't know what to do with her dog's remains, bury her pet on his property. Johnson's act of kindness would turn into the country's first pet cemetery. The hillside burial ground, which overlooks



The Hartsdale Pet Cemetery has been named one of the top 10 cemeteries in the world by Lonely Planet's "Best in Travel 2009" guide. (Ricky Flores/The Journal News)

North Central Avenue, now contains some 15,000 plots, Martin said. Paths covered in leaves lead to countless headstones, festooned with flowers and balloons that fill the nearly 5-acre property.

Each year, some 600 animals are buried there, Martin said. Owners can either inter their pets' cremated ashes or put them in caskets.

While 98 percent of the animals are cats and dogs, there are rabbits, birds, turtles and at least two cremated horses in the ground, Martin said. Interestingly, the cemetery is not just for animals. About 10 people's cremated remains are laid to rest there each year, Martin said. His favorite spot is a remote area that looks out over the terrain, where his parents and in-laws, along with one of his dogs, are buried, he said.

Geraldine Mitchell of Hawthorne visits Hartsdale Pet Cemetery twice a week to pay respects to her two dogs, Maggie, a shepherd mix, and Lily, a purebred cocker spaniel. Yesterday, Mitchell offered special prayers to her pets, who she said were "like my children."

"This is a very quiet, very spiritual and safe place, where I can come and talk to them and reminisce," said Mitchell, a nurse. "For me, this place gives me a sense of peace. They are part of my family. They give you unconditional love. So we try to give back, like you would a loved one."

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