



A VERY SPECIAL PARK

Heritage

The Newsletter of Green Lawn Cemetery
Special Edition—January 2021

The Lorax of Green Lawn

Reprinted from The Columbus Dispatch, November 30, 2020 by Holly Zachariah, photos Doral Chenoweth



Rogers, who bought plots for he and his family at Green Lawn Cemetery. He said sometimes he and his wife picnic at the spot.

Left: Randy Rogers cleans the angel statue atop the monument for Revolutionary War soldier William Walcutt

Lone employee lovingly cares for cemetery

Randy Rogers zipped down the winding paths of Green Lawn Cemetery, his untucked chambray shirt flapping in the wind and the John Deere Gator he steered with one hand kicking up colorful cyclones of fallen leaves behind him.

Rogers was burning daylight, he knew, and he still had tow trees to plant and some security cameras to move around before the afternoon sun dipped below the horizon. But even if he wasn't finished when darkness set in, it would have been OK. Because here, to him, even the cover of night brings a joyful reward.

For if he stands still enough, he senses the coyotes who prowl here as they leave their dens. And if he listens closely enough, he hears the howls as they call together others for their nightly hunt. And that is just one of the countless things that remind him of what special place this is that is entrusted to his care.

“Green Lawn ahs become a part of my identity,” said Rogers, the volunteer president of the Green Lawn Cemetery Association’s board of trustees and its only paid employee as executive director. Though, as the 54-year-old points out with a shrug and a grin, it’s only supposed to be a part-time job despite his regular 50 or 60 hours a week. *(cont. next page)*

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Green Lawn Heritage Newsletter

Carol LeMasters, *Community Outreach Coordinator*

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President's Message

Our Special Edition is Really About YOU!



Although I am very flattered by this article (and was very surprised it made the front page!), and also by the Green Lawn Cemetery Foundation reprinting it in this special edition of *Heritage*, I want to clearly acknowledge that I am but a face of the cemetery, the association, and the foundation.

None of the things in this article happen without the support of an enthusiastic board, and the dedication and generosity of the Friends of Green Lawn and the donors who support their annual campaign.

I look forward to being involved at Green Lawn for many years to come and to doing what I can to turn your support and desires for a well-preserved, fiscally sound, and beautiful Green Lawn into reality.

Randy Rogers, President and Executive Director
Green Lawn Cemetery Association

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“All of the families’ stories here, all of the families’ histories, reflect our city,” he said. “And aside from its historical significance, it is a place to find peace, tranquility, and nature. You can center yourself here.”

Some who know Rogers call him “The Lorax of Green Lawn,” because just like the Dr. Seuss character by the same name, they say he “speaks for the trees,” in his unwavering commitment to preserving nature.

Others call him the cemetery’s “resident saint” for unending work that sometimes borders on manic (they add with a kind laugh). Many see him as a treasure for his historical knowledge when he leads countless tours and his reverence for those who rest here. But mostly, everyone who meets him just call him friend.

“Randy lives and breathes Green Lawn Cemetery. We are so fortunate to have him,” said Lynne Jeffrey, who is president of the cemetery’s nonprofit fundraising arm, the Green Lawn Cemetery

Foundation. “Whatever he does, he goes full throttle.”

She talks about how when Rogers conceived the plan for the cemetery (which is an official arboretum) to invest \$15,000 annually to plant 200 trees a year, no one ever dreamed that he would plant 75% of those in the past six years himself.

Then, her voice rising with an air of disbelief and with the art of every good storyteller, she exclaims, “And you know what? Imagine this! I mean, he drives to Pennsylvania each year to personally get the trees!”

She goes on. “He’s a saint, He always says “I grew into Green Lawn and Green Lawn grew into me.”

But before anyone called him The Lorax, Rogers had another title: That’s retired U.S. Army MAJ Randel L. Rogers to you.

A combat veteran who commissioned through Ohio University ROTC, he spent 28 years active duty, reserves, and the Ohio Army National Guard in positions that ranged from psychological *(cont.)*

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operations to infantry and logistics.

In the late 1990s, he took up bird-watching as a hobby. He even has a presentation about birdwatching in Iraq.

And that's mostly how local lawyer Warren Grody came to know him. Both avid birdwatchers, Grody worked with Rogers several years ago on a project for a Scioto Audubon Metro Parks project.

"The one thing about Randy is that he'll never be bored," said Grody, also a dedicated Green Lawn volunteer. "His military background means that he knows how to plan a project and complete it. He's incredible."

So let's back up a bit and explain.

Before Rogers retired from the military, he had bought a house on the West Side in 1998 and hung a single birdfeeder in the backyard. The hobby soon became a bit of an obsession. And before long, he discovered that Green Lawn is a birder's paradise.

Then several things melded together at the right time. He met his wife, Doreen, and they married in

2013 and he retired from the military in 2014 before taking a job as a part-time MetroParks ranger. At about the same time Jim McCormac—who then worked for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and is a famed naturalist, botanist, arborist, bird expert and nature photographer—was leaving the Green Lawn Board of Trustees. He thought Rogers would make an excellent replacement.

And now here he still is.

Rogers says the cemetery combines much of what he loves: history, nature, conservation and preservation, and being a public servant.

On that recent fall day full of tasks, he started with some paperwork, logging in donations and sending emails. His lunch was spent the same as it is every day. Exactly the same. At 11 a.m. he heads to the W.G. Grinders on W. Broad Street where he always orders a Pizza Grinder with sausage, a couple of chocolate chip cookies, and an iced tea with four Sweet'N Lows.

He knows it seems ridiculous but he likes (cont.)

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order in his life. He blames the military.

“It’s always about completing a task,” he laughs. “And lunch is a task.”

But soon after arriving back at the cemetery just before noon, his cell phone buzzed. A cemetery worker digging for a backed-up drainage pipe near the New Garden Mausoleum had found the problem, and water was spewing everywhere. “Maybe you should come take a look,” he told Rogers. So off Rogers went.

After diagnosing the problem and determining next steps, off he went in his pickup to check the progress of workers installing new headstones at the graves of some of the 78 Union soldiers buried without markers at Green Lawn.

With Green Lawn founded in 1848, more than 154,000 burials since, and encompassing 360 acres and seemingly a million projects that must still be done, Rogers sometimes gets discouraged.

“It’s easy to feel like I’m on a treadmill,” he said. “But then I come across one monument, or a centuries old native tree, some reminder that what we are preserving here is history one story at a time. We are keeping families’ memories alive. That is lasting.”

As for Green Lawn itself, he has his favorite spots. He loves section G, “the heart of the cemetery.” It holds the earliest burials and some of the oldest trees. It still showcases Columbus’ original topography with a glacial ridge as its landscaping centerpiece.

Yet that isn’t his most precious spot. No, that’s what is known as Island 10 near the cemetery pond and the historic Hayden Mausoleum.

Here, under an ancient chinkapin oak and beside a newly planted baby sassafras is the final resting spot of Clan Rogers.

Patriarch Garnett L. Rogers, a Marine who served in Vietnam, died in 2019 and is memorialized there

now with a cenotaph. Eventually, Randy Rogers’ mom with rest here, too, as will his brother, and Doreen, and, of course, Rogers himself.

Rogers and his wife picnic here often, spreading out a blanket and lying on their backs to peer up through the canopy of storied trees. There, they think about all that life has offered them and count their blessings.

And they ponder what comes later.

“We look and say ‘Yeah, we can live with this view for a few thousand years,’” Rogers said with a laugh. Then, later, he turns serious. “Where you rest, where you are remembered, that matters.”

The block-granite boulder that marks the spot is rough-cut rather than smooth and built to last, its etching deep cut so that it won’t fade. And on one side is a crest chosen by the family based on the old Irish folk song, “Minstrel Boy”, a song about honoring your commitment.

For Rogers, that means everything.

