

Growing Together: The Aurora Cemetery Corp.



By Brock Weir

The Auroran continues its series of some of Aurora's oldest businesses with a look at the Aurora Cemetery Corporation.

As a child, April Ross always told her mother that when she grew up she would be ?running the elevator to heaven.?

Perhaps it goes without saying that her parents didn't take what she said literally, but Ms. Ross took her childhood aspirations as literally as possible. Ms. Ross now runs the day to day operations of the Aurora Cemetery, one of Aurora's most venerable businesses.

Founded in the southern end of Town in 1869, the original plot of land has served generations of local families, and continues to do so to this day.

For Ms. Ross, and the Cemetery's administrative assistant Cindy Angers, it is a place of serenity and tranquility in an increasingly bustling community. It's not rare for Ms. Ross to be found at the peak of the cemetery's highest hill looking down at the history around her. It also affords her the opportunity to see every corner of the property in the quickest of glances.

Considering Aurora Cemetery is the only game in Town, it almost seems counterproductive to ask why April and Cindy think their company endures, but they nevertheless have a few insights.

?It's all in how you deal with people,? said Ms. Ross. ?Cindy and I work with people who have lost loved ones and are often very angry. We get people in here who accept it and they are easy to deal with, but we have to wear many, many hats.?

?A gentleman said to me on Tuesday when he came into purchase that one thing about this cemetery after looking at others, they are just flat, but here it has hills and is more in keeping with a beautiful cemetery atmosphere,? added Cindy.

Indeed, Aurora's early settlers and contemporary notables have chosen the Yonge Street location as their final resting place. Beyond the buildings many people are familiar with, particularly the octagonal white and green ?Dead House? ? which was once used to store the remains of people who died over the winter before the thaw ? is the well-loved monument to John W. Bowser, Construction Superintendent of the Empire State Building. His tombstone can be easily found, constructed in the shape of the iconic Manhattan landmark. There are also graves bearing names which can be found on many landmarks and streets throughout the Town.

Many of the historical figures are buried in the north end of the cemetery. But with these plots maxed out in internment rights, the Cemetery recently opened up their south end for internments. Ms. Ross estimates this will continue to serve the community for the

next 60 years.

?There is a lot of historical interest with the people who come here,? she says. ?They like to walk around [looking at names] and also whole families being wiped out in the early 1900s from smallpox.?

Those, however, were very different days and challenges facing the Aurora Cemetery today include ensuring each interment is handled as sensitively as possible, but also addressing people's changing perspectives of what they want to get out of their cemetery.

These include increased desire for more individual and distinctive monuments, as well as areas serving distinct nationalities and ethnic backgrounds, such as cemeteries marketed towards people of specific religion and ethnicities in the Greater Toronto Area.

?That won't happen on my watch,? says Ms. Ross with a laugh. ?Everyone is welcome because we're all equal. It doesn't matter where we're from or what colour we are, everyone goes together.

?I used to tell my mum I would be running the elevator to heaven ? and I am! God put me here for a reason and everything does happen for a reason.?