

Nonprofit Jewish cemetery to be built in Lantana

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According to Rabbi Jay Lyons — the Florida regional director of the National Association of Chevra Kadisha burial society — the state of Jewish burial today too often means:

- High cost;
- Emotionally disconnected services;
- Disjointed community involvement; and
- Misleading myths about non-burial methods such as cremation.

That's why soon after joining the National Association of Chevra Kadisha three years ago, Lyons began looking into building a nonprofit Jewish cemetery to alleviate some of these conditions.

Today, Lyons' dream is well on the way to becoming a reality as the South Florida Jewish Cemetery is scheduled to open some time in the summer of 2017.

Fifteen acres of land for the cemetery has been purchased in Lantana on Congress Avenue, just south of Lantana Road; the project has been approved by the [Palm Beach County](#) Board of County Commissioners and Zoning Commission; the site plan has been approved; and construction plans have been made.

"This is an exciting project that we are looking forward to bringing to fruition," said Lyons, who also will be the cemetery's director.

According to Lyons, some of the advantages of having this nonprofit Jewish cemetery available as a burial option in South Florida include:

- Reinvesting revenue into Jewish education and indigent burial;
- Providing pristine and beautiful facilities at a low price;
- Providing a family atmosphere with compassionate rabbis to conduct services;
- Conducting seminars on Jewish afterlife and attitudes toward death/mourning;
- Accommodating indigent cases without the need to raise thousands of dollars on a case-by-case emergency basis;
- Countering the alarming trend of cremation by providing affordable burial;
- Promoting environmental responsibility by providing green burial only (the only cemetery south of Gainesville to provide certified green burial).

Lyons also said the cemetery will adhere to traditional Jewish burial practices such as:

- Family/friends to participate in accompaniment of the deceased — including carrying the casket and filling the grave;
- Discounted burial for impoverished families;

- Seminars and resources for mourners;
- No concrete vaults in keeping with the tradition of burying directly in the ground;
- Upright monuments allowed at every grave;
- No mausoleum;
- No cremated or embalmed remains;
- Open on national holidays and accommodating after-hours burial to ensure expeditious burial (following the mandate to bury as soon as possible);
- Up-front pricing (no opening and closing fees);
- As a nonprofit, employees answer to a board of rabbis not a board of investors;
- No heavy equipment driving over graves.

In letters to [Palm Beach County](#) as part of the approval process, area Orthodox rabbis expressed their support for the cemetery. Excerpts of these letters are as follows:

Rabbi Benjamin S. Yasgur, Congregation Torah Ohr, [Boca Raton](#): "When our sojourn in this world comes to an end, Jewish tradition mandates many practices to express our reverence for the body that housed a soul. ... I am confident the proposed cemetery will be able to meet the traditional needs of our membership."

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg, Boca Raton Synagogue: "Because South [Palm Beach County](#) has such a large Jewish population, I feel there is a need for a cemetery that follows the guidelines set for a Jewish burial. ... This cemetery would also create a plan to accommodate indigent burial, which is a great need in our community."

Rabbi Jack Engle, Anshei Emuna Congregation, Delray Beach: "As [Palm Beach County](#) has become one of the primary destinations for Orthodox Jews, burial needs of those constituents must be addressed. ... Many of these new Floridians are more observant and demand that burial arrangements be performed according to the strict standards of Orthodox Judaism."

Rabbi Eliyahu Rabovsky, Young Israel of Boca Raton: "The [Palm Beach County](#) Jewish community has an urgent need for additional and affordable burial grounds for the current and ever-growing Jewish population. ... The development of this new project will address this vital communal need in a dynamic manner."

Rabbi Seymour Goldstein, Congregation Aitz Chaim, West Palm Beach: "Jewish tradition mandates that a person's body must be returned to G-d in the same way it was given. This requires burial in the ground and excludes cremation. ... Recently, many Jewish people have chosen cremation solely for financial reasons. ... There is no reason a person should have to violate his beliefs because of lack of affordability."

For more information about the cemetery, to join the mailing list in order to be contacted when graves are available for purchase, or to make a donation to the cemetery's Capital Campaign, visit www.southfloridajewishcemetery.org.

To contact Lyons, email rabbi@southfloridajewishcemetery.org or call 561-376-9972.