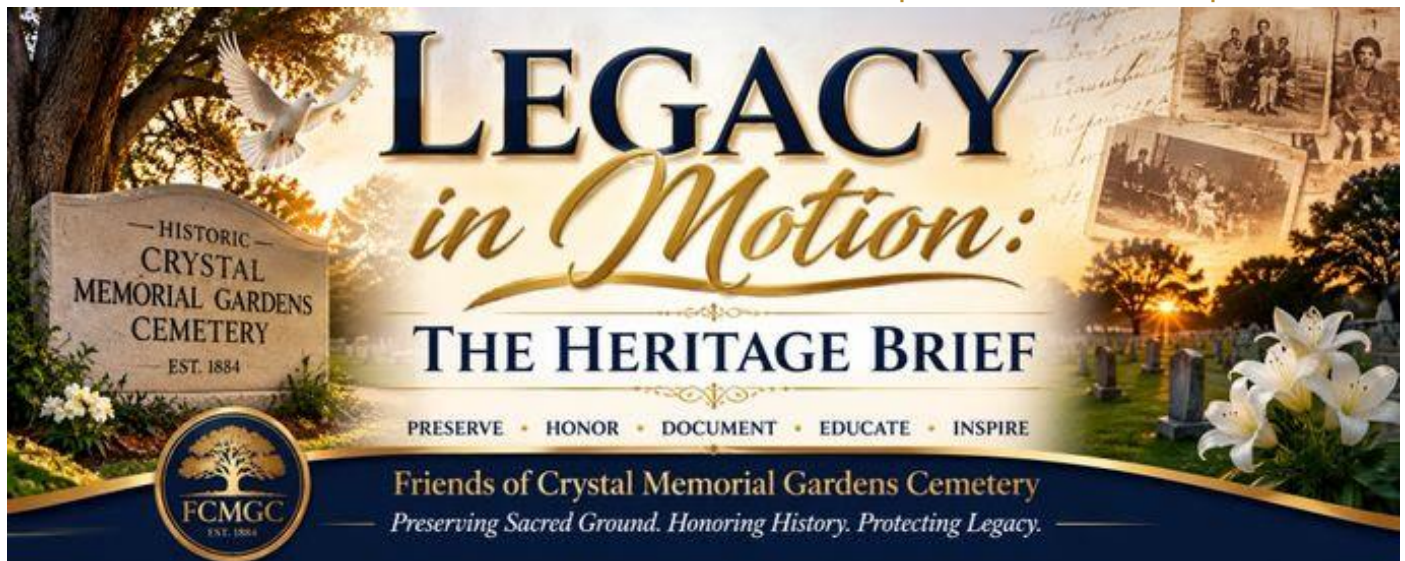




AUGUST 2026 • SPECIAL PRESERVATION & LEGACY EDITION

What Lies Beneath

Recovering unmarked and sunken graves, stories, and sacred history at Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery

A Message from the President & CEO

When Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery was founded in April 2023, we accepted a sacred responsibility: to preserve this historic burial ground, honor those entrusted to its care, and recover the stories time had obscured.

The work now underway is revealing the true scale of that responsibility. With 75% of the active 3.17-acre portion of the cemetery surveyed, more than 350 probable burial locations have been identified. Many appear to be sunken, unmarked, or absent from surviving records. Preliminary projections indicate that the cemetery may hold approximately 1,000-1,200 burials when the full investigation is complete.

These findings remind us that preservation is not simply about land or monuments. It is about people - their names, their families, their sacrifices, and their rightful place in our shared history.

As we complete this important grant-funded phase, I remain profoundly grateful to our partners, volunteers, donors, descendants, and community supporters. Together, we are transforming forgotten ground into documented history and ensuring that every life resting here is treated with dignity.



Andrea K. McCray
Founder, President &
CEO

“Every burial located is a life returned to the historical record.”

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Expanded GPR discoveries • State appropriation update • Tree and vegetation stewardship • Community partnerships • Leadership transition • Biennial MLK Leadership Gala • What comes next

LEAD STORY

The Ground Is Speaking

Expanded GPR work is revealing a far larger and more complex burial landscape than previously documented.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

350+ probable burial locations identified as of this writing • Approximately 75% of the cemetery surveyed • An estimated 1,000-1,200 total burials may be present when the full investigation is complete. Currently, the total gravesite count is over 500 burials.

Why the GPR Survey Expanded

Ground-penetrating radar uses non-invasive technology to identify subsurface anomalies consistent with burial shafts and grave features. The survey does not disturb the ground. Instead, it provides trained archaeological professionals with data that can help map probable burial locations and guide future documentation and preservation decisions.

The initial fieldwork revealed a concentration of probable graves well beyond what surviving markers and records suggested. Many locations show signs of subsidence, while others have no visible monument at all. Because the discoveries were so significant, the scope of the GPR investigation was expanded to provide a more complete and responsible assessment of the historic cemetery.

Responding Responsibly to the Findings

The organization canceled the planned flood-mitigation study and requested that the designated \$15,000 be reallocated to the expanded GPR effort. This did not increase the State's \$81,000 grant award; it repositioned approved resources to address the cemetery's most urgent preservation need. The GPR work itself represents a substantially greater professional value than the amount supported by grant funds.

What the Numbers Mean

- The 350+ findings are described as probable burial locations until the professional archaeological report is finalized. More are expected once the GPR is completed and all the data is analyzed.
- The estimate of 1,000- 1,200 burials is preliminary and based on findings from surveye to date.
- The data will support mapping, cemetery-record development, future conservation planning, and descendant research.
- No conclusion about individual identity can be made from GPR data alone; historical records and family information remain essential.

A SACRED OBLIGATION

Every newly documented location strengthens our ability to protect the cemetery from accidental disturbance, preserve its historic integrity, and recognize people whose graves may have remained unmarked for generations.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT AT WORK

State Appropriation Progress

The \$81,000 Florida State Appropriation is supporting a coordinated program of research, documentation, safety, and preservation.

CEMETERY PROJECT UPDATES	
Expanded GPR Survey	Non-invasive archaeological investigation and mapping of the entire 3.17 acres of the active portion of the cemetery. <i>75% of cemetery grounds surveyed.</i>
Cemetery Management Software	A stronger digital foundation for burial records, mapping, research, and long-term stewardship. <i>Planned.</i>
Tree & Vegetation Maintenance	Targeted canopy cleaning and hazard reduction to protect people, graves, and monuments. <i>Scheduled for Fall 2026.</i>
Water Pump Repair / Replacement	Restoration of essential site infrastructure needed for ongoing cemetery care. <i>In Progress — Plans Completed.</i>
Monument Restoration	Professional attention to historically significant and damaged headstones, in partnership with Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN). <i>In Progress.</i>
Directional Signage	Improved identification and wayfinding for visitors and descendant families. <i>In Progress — Plans Completed.</i>
Florida Historical Marker	Public recognition of the cemetery’s history and statewide significance. <i>Planned.</i>
Administration & Reporting	Required documentation, financial stewardship, deliverable tracking, and grant compliance. <i>In Progress.</i>

Stewardship Through Adaptation

Preservation work must respond to evidence. The approved budget adjustment reflects disciplined stewardship: when field findings demonstrated that the cemetery’s undocumented burial landscape was more extensive than anticipated, resources were redirected toward the work most essential to protecting it. The total grant award remains unchanged.

GRANT PRINCIPLE

Public funds must be used transparently, documented carefully, and directed toward measurable preservation outcomes. Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery remains committed to each of those responsibilities.

PROTECTING SACRED GROUND

Safety, Stewardship & Partnership

Preservation is strongest when specialized knowledge, community commitment, and respectful site care work together.

Tree and Vegetation Maintenance

Targeted canopy cleaning and hazardous-tree maintenance are necessary to protect graves, monuments, visitors, volunteers, and preservation professionals.

Planned work includes trimming the hazardous “Widowmaker Oak,” removing a large dead oak tree, and addressing other vegetation requiring professional maintenance. The canopies of the remaining trees will be lifted to improve clearance, visibility, and safe access throughout the cemetery.

This work is preservation-focused - not unnecessary clearing. Tree care will be performed deliberately, with the goal of reducing hazards while respecting the cemetery’s historic landscape and minimizing disturbance near known or probable burial locations.

Preservation Partners

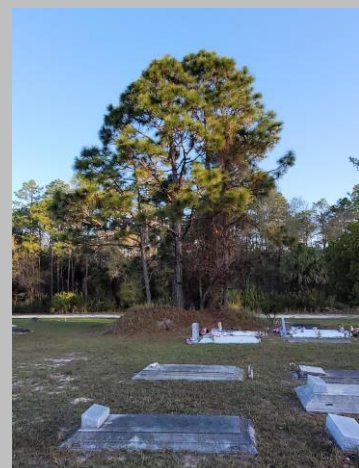
The progress at the Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery reflects a growing network of public, professional, veteran, community, and volunteer partners. We gratefully recognize:

- Florida Division of Historical Resources
- Gulf Archaeology Research Institute (GARI)
- Crystal Memorial Gardens Board of Directors
- Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN)
- Bunch Lawn Care & Tree Service
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10087, Beverly Hills
- American Legion Post 155, Crystal River
- Citrus County Sheriff’s Office
- Crystal River High School
- Citrus County Historical Society
- Andrea K & Co
- BraLonni’s Event Venue
- Descendant families, volunteers, donors, and community supporters

Partnership is not merely a feature of this work; it is the model that makes long-term preservation possible. Each contributor brings knowledge, capacity, history, or service that helps move the cemetery from vulnerability toward sustainable stewardship.



The "Widowmaker" Oak



INSTITUTIONAL LEGACY

Preparing the Way Forward

A leadership transition designed to strengthen continuity, sustainability, and the mission beyond its founder.

Leadership Transition

Effective September 30, 2026, Andrea K. McCray will conclude her service as President & CEO of Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery. She will continue serving the mission as Founder and Preservation Advisor in a non-executive, advisory capacity.

Since founding the organization in April 2023, McCray has helped establish its public identity, organize community support, build preservation partnerships, secure state investment, expand documentation of the cemetery, and position the work for its next stage. The transition is an intentional step in institutional development - creating room for operational leadership while preserving continuity of vision and historical knowledge.

Citrus County MLK Leadership Gala Moves to a Biennial Schedule

The Board has adopted a biennial schedule for the Citrus County Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Gala. Accordingly, a Gala will not be held in January 2027. The date of the next celebration will be announced when planning begins.

The biennial format provides more time for sponsorship development, thoughtful programming, honoree selection, and the high-quality community experience associated with the event. This is a strategic evolution of the Gala rather than an end to its purpose.

The MLK Leadership Gala will continue to celebrate service, leadership, and the enduring principles of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. while supporting the broader preservation and community mission of Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery.

Images from the 2026 Citrus County MLK Leadership Gala



“Legacy is not simply what we inherit. It is what we organize, protect, and prepare to pass forward.”

LEGACY PRESERVATION



Community Clean-Up Days

Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery

Preserving Sacred Ground - Together

Community volunteers are invited to join Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery for two upcoming preservation-focused clean-up days. Every helping hand strengthens the care, dignity, and stewardship of this historic African American cemetery, established in 1884.

SATURDAY**OCTOBER 3, 2026 | 8:00 am to 12 noon**

9640 W Garden Street, Crystal River, FL 34428

**SATURDAY****NOVEMBER 7, 2026 | 8:00 am to 12 noon**

9640 W Garden Street, Crystal River, FL 34428

**How You Can Help**

Volunteers help with general cemetery grounds care, light debris removal, and other appropriate tasks identified for the day. Work is carried out respectfully around graves, markers, and monuments. Additional participation details will be shared before each scheduled clean-up date.

SAVE THE DATES | SERVE THE LEGACY

Honor the past. Care for the present. Preserve the future.

THE NEXT CHAPTER

Help Us Restore the Record

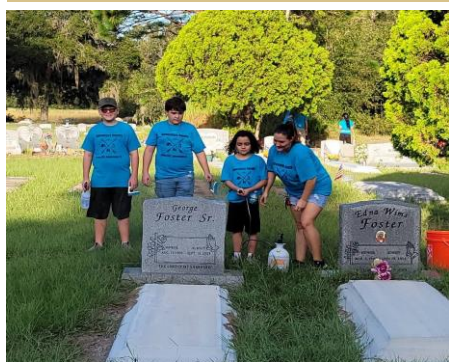
The next phase will connect archaeological findings with names, records, family histories, and long-term preservation planning.

What Comes Next

- Complete the expanded GPR fieldwork and professional archaeological report.
- Document and map probable burial locations while protecting sensitive information.
- Integrate mapping into cemetery management software.
- Advance monument conservation, tree care, infrastructure, signage, and the Florida Historical Marker.
- Develop a long-term preservation and cemetery-management plan.
- Invite descendant families to contribute names, obituaries, funeral programs, photographs, and family histories.

DESCENDANT FAMILIES

Do you believe an ancestor or loved one may be buried at the Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery? Your family records may help restore a name to the historical record. Please share names, dates, documents, photographs, and oral histories with the organization.



Ways to Participate

SHARE HISTORY

Contribute family records, burial information, photographs, and stories.

SUPPORT PRESERVATION

Volunteer, make a tax-deductible contribution, or sponsor preservation work.

STAY CONNECTED

Follow project updates and share the Heritage Brief with descendants and community members.

Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery
Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery • Established 1884

PRESERVE • HONOR • DOCUMENT • EDUCATE • INSPIRE

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