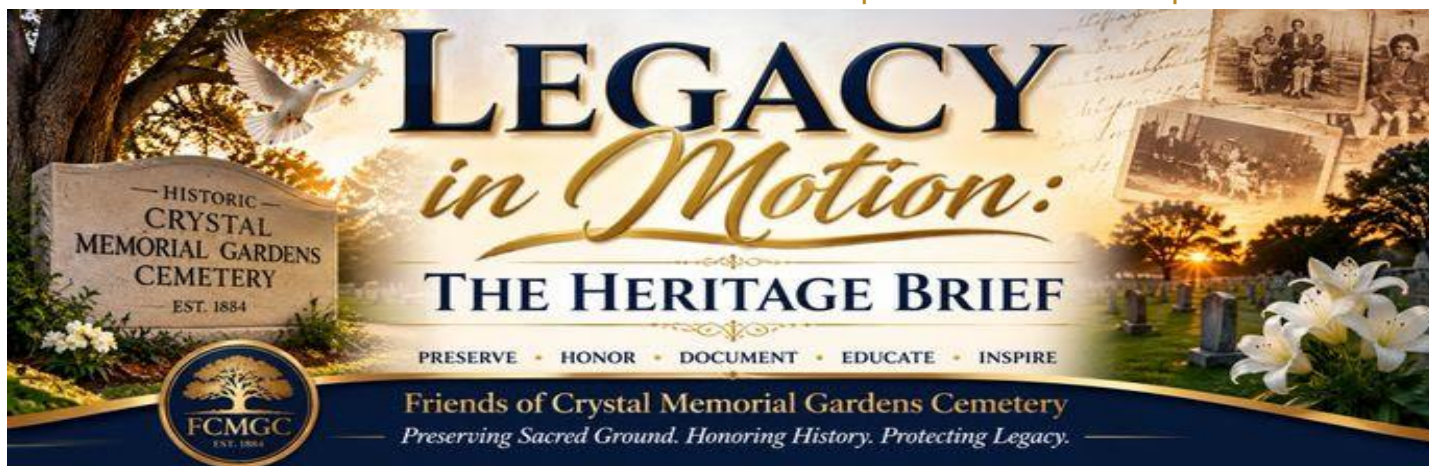




SEPTEMBER 2026 • TRANSITION & STEWARDSHIP EDITION

A Chapter Closes. The Legacy Continues.

A final message from the President & CEO - and a commitment to preservation beyond the title.

A Message from the President & CEO

September closes an important chapter in the story of Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery.

When I founded this organization in April 2023, the mission was clear: protect sacred ground, restore dignity to a historic African American cemetery, and build the partnerships necessary to preserve its history for generations to come.

Over the past three and a half years, that mission has moved from vision to measurable preservation and community impact. State investment has been secured. Archaeological investigation has expanded our understanding of the burial landscape, with more than 550 probable burials identified and additional findings expected. Tree and vegetation stewardship has advanced, monument preservation is moving forward, and a stronger foundation now exists for documentation, mapping, infrastructure, and long-term care.

We also built community around this sacred place. Through partnerships with preservation professionals, public agencies, veterans, descendants, businesses, volunteers, and community organizations, we coordinated numerous cemetery cleanups and hosted three Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Galas, strengthening relationships and bringing greater visibility to the cemetery and its history.

Effective October 1, 2026, I will step away from executive leadership as President & CEO and continue serving as Founder and Preservation Advisor. This transition is intentional. Healthy institutions must be able to carry their mission beyond any one leader—including the person who founded them. My role will change, but my commitment to this sacred place and the legacies represented here will remain.

I leave the President & CEO role with profound gratitude for our Board, preservation professionals, public partners, volunteers, donors, descendants, veterans, and community members who believed this sacred place deserved to be seen, documented, protected, preserved, and remembered.

What began as a vision in April 2023 is now preservation in motion. The foundation has been laid, the history is being uncovered, and the responsibility of stewardship continues. It has been one of the great honors of my life to lead this work.



Andrea K. McCray
Founder, President
& CEO
Through Sept 30, 2026

“Leadership changes. The obligation to preserve does not.”

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GPR progress • Grant extension through December 31 • Tree stewardship completed • Preservation partnerships • Leadership transition • Community clean-up days • Board Leadership & Phase II

PRESERVATION DISCOVERY

The Record is Growing

September findings continue to confirm that the cemetery's undocumented burial landscape is far larger than surviving markers alone suggest.

SEPTEMBER PRESERVATION SNAPSHOT

More than 550 probable burial locations have been identified to date. Additional burials are expected as field findings are reviewed and professional analysis continues.

From Discovery to Documentation

Ground-penetrating radar (GPR) provided by Gulf Archaeological Research Institute (GARI) is helping preservation professionals identify subsurface anomalies consistent with grave shafts and burial features without disturbing the ground. The work is especially important at our historic Crystal Memorial Gardens (established 1884), where many graves are sunken, unmarked, or missing from surviving records.

The growing count is not simply a statistic. Each probable location represents a person whose resting place must be protected from accidental disturbance and, where possible, connected to historical records, descendant knowledge, and cemetery documentation.

The professional archaeological process remains essential. GPR can identify probable burial locations, but it cannot establish individual identity by itself. Names and family connections require historical research, burial records, obituaries, funeral programs, photographs, oral histories, and descendant participation.

What September Clarified

- The cemetery contains substantially more burials than visible markers indicate.
- The expanded survey and data analysis are central to responsible future mapping and stewardship.
- Preservation decisions must be guided by evidence as new information emerges.
- Descendant records will remain vital to restoring names and family histories to the historical record.

What the Numbers Mean

- The 550+ findings are described as probable burial locations until the professional archaeological report is finalized. More burials are expected once the GPR is completed and all the data is analyzed.
- The estimate of 1,000 - 1,200 total burials is preliminary and based on findings surveyed to date.

PRESERVATION PRINCIPLE

A grave does not become historically important only when a marker survives. The work of preservation is to protect the people, stories, and sacred ground that history has entrusted to us.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT AT WORK

State Grant Extended Through December 31

The preservation timeline has been extended to allow the remaining grant-funded work to be completed carefully and responsibly.

Grant Extension

On September 18, 2026, the State grant amendment extending the project period through December 31, 2026 was signed. The extension provides additional time for remaining deliverables, professional documentation, and project closeout while preserving the original \$81,000 State award.

CEMETERY PROJECT UPDATES	
Expanded GPR Survey	Field investigation expanded. 550+ probable burials identified; analysis continuing.
Tree & Vegetation Maintenance	Professional, preservation-focused tree maintenance began and was completed in September as part of the State-funded preservation program. September accomplishments included: • Removal of a large, dead oak tree that presented a safety hazard. • Trimming of the identified “widow maker” oak to address hazardous limbs and reduce risk. • Removal of the designated group of pine trees included in the approved scope of work. • Canopy lifting and maintenance of the remaining trees to improve visibility, accessibility, and overall safety throughout the cemetery.
Water Pump Repair / Replacement	Plans completed; implementation project planned with Lecanto High School.
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>On Hold until Results of GPR Survey Completed.</i>
Florida Historical Marker	Planned as part of the broader documentation and public history effort.
Administration & Reporting	Grant amendment executed; documentation, invoices, deliverables, and compliance tracking continue.

Stewardship In Action

Tree and Vegetation Maintenance Completed

Professional tree maintenance **began and was completed during September** as part of the State-funded preservation program at Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery. This phase represented another important step toward improving safety and protecting the cemetery's historic landscape.

September Accomplishments

During September, professional tree maintenance crews:

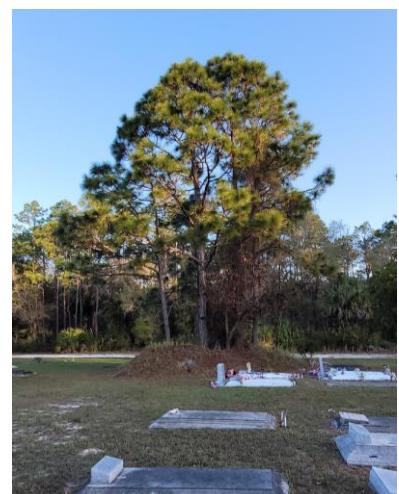
- Removed identified hazardous limbs and other tree-related safety concerns.
- Lifted and maintained tree canopies to improve visibility and safe access throughout the cemetery.
- Addressed hazardous tree and canopy conditions identified earlier in the preservation project.
- Improved accessibility for visitors, volunteers, contractors, and preservation professionals.
- Reduced potential threats to graves, monuments, and other historic cemetery features.
- Performed the work with particular care around known and probable burial areas.

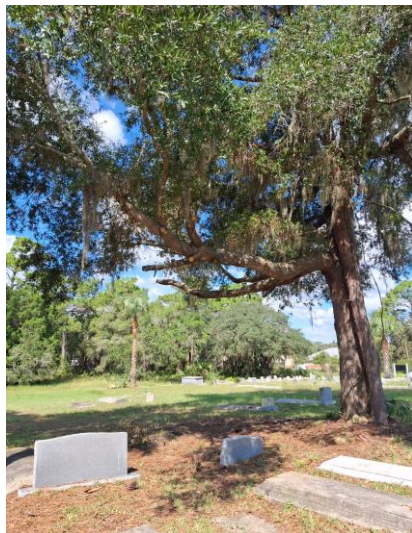
This work was **preservation-focused maintenance—not indiscriminate clearing**. Tree maintenance within a historic cemetery requires a deliberate approach that balances public safety with protection of graves, monuments, archaeological resources, and the character of the historic landscape.

Part of a Larger Preservation System

Tree stewardship is one component of the broader preservation work underway at Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery. Archaeology, monument conservation, infrastructure improvements, directional signage, historical documentation, and community stewardship all work together to create a sustainable system for protecting the cemetery over time.

The tree maintenance accomplished in September leaves the cemetery **safer, more accessible, and better positioned for the preservation work that continues ahead**.





STEWARDSHIP MEANS FINISHING WELL

An extension is not a pause in accountability. It is an opportunity to complete complex preservation work with documentation, professional review, and care that sacred ground requires. The organization remains responsible for transparent use of public funds and measurable preservation outcomes.

Preservation Partners

September's progress reflects the work of public agencies, archaeological professionals, preservation specialists, community organizations, veterans, contractors, descendants, volunteers, donors, and local supporters. Among the partners contributing to this broader effort are:

- 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
- City of Crystal River
- City of Crystal River Fire Department
- Crystal River High School
- Lecanto High School
- Boy Scouts, Troop 418
- Boy Scouts, Troop 457
- 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 MODEL FOR LONG-TERM CARE

Preservation succeeds when expertise, community commitment, public investment, and respectful stewardship are organized around a shared responsibility to protect sacred ground

Passing the Work Forward

A founder's responsibility is not only to begin the work, but to prepare the mission to continue beyond her executive leadership.

Leadership Transition

Andrea K. McCray concludes her service as President & CEO on **September 30, 2026**. Effective **October 1, 2026**, she will serve as **Founder and Preservation Advisor** in a non-executive advisory role.

Since founding Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery in April 2023, McCray has helped establish the organization's public identity, build preservation partnerships, secure State investment, expand documentation of the cemetery, organize community support, and position the work for its next stage.

A Final Reflection from Andrea K. McCray

This organization began with a simple conviction: the people resting at Crystal Memorial Gardens deserve dignity, and their history deserves protection. That conviction has never changed.

I am deeply proud of what has been built, but I am even more mindful of what remains. Preservation is generational work. It requires patience, disciplined stewardship, credible partnerships, and the humility to understand that no one person owns the mission.

As I move into the role of Founder and Preservation Advisor, I will continue to support historical continuity, preservation strategy, institutional knowledge, and the protection of the cemetery's legacy. I am not leaving the mission. I am changing how I serve it.

To everyone who stood with us - thank you. Thank you for believing that forgotten does not mean unworthy, that unmarked does not mean unknown forever, and that a community can choose to recover and protect its own history.

"The strongest legacy is not the title we keep. It is the work we prepare others to carry forward."

EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 2026

Andrea K. McCray

Founder & Preservation Advisor

Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery

The Stewardship Continues

As Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery enters its next chapter, responsibility for the organization's governance and continued advancement of its mission rests with its Board of Directors.

We are pleased to recognize the Board members who will continue serving Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery:

- ☑ **Josh McCray**, Board Member
- ☑ **Greg Sawyer**, Board Member
- ☑ **Vicki Sawyer-Lindo**, Board Member
- ☑ **Dr. Danita Smith**, Board Member

Together, the Board will provide leadership and oversight as the organization completes the remaining work associated with the current preservation initiative and prepares for the next stage of stewardship at historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery.

The foundation for this next chapter is substantial. More than 550 probable burial locations have been identified, with additional findings expected as professional analysis continues. The State-funded preservation project has been extended through December 31, 2026, allowing additional time for remaining deliverables, documentation, and project closeout.

Looking Ahead: Phase II

The work of preservation does not end with the completion of the current project. The discoveries, partnerships, documentation, and improvements achieved during this phase have created a stronger foundation for the cemetery's future.

Please expect Board Leadership, in partnership with the cemetery's Board of Directors, to communicate next steps for Phase II, including future preservation priorities, organizational leadership, community engagement, and opportunities for descendants, partners, volunteers, and supporters to remain involved.

As Founder and Preservation Advisor, Andrea K. McCray will remain available in a non-executive advisory capacity to support historical continuity, preservation strategy, institutional knowledge, and protection of the cemetery's legacy. This is consistent with the transition outlined in this edition: "I am not leaving the mission. I am changing how I serve it."

A Mission Larger Than Any One Leader

Friends of Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery was established around a responsibility that transcends titles and individuals: to preserve sacred ground, honor those who rest there, document their history, educate future generations, and inspire continued stewardship.

The leadership may change. **The responsibility continues.**

SERVE THE LEGACY

Honor the past. Care for the Present. Preserve the Future.

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.

How You Can Help

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

SATURDAY – OCTOBER 3, 2026

Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery

8:00 am to 12 noon

9640 W Garden Street

Crystal River, FL 34428



SATURDAY - NOVEMBER 7, 2026

Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery

8:00 am to 12 noon

9640 W Garden Street

Crystal River, FL 34428



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.

Community care is not separate from preservation. It is one of the ways a living community demonstrates that those who came before us still matter.

Preservation Beyond the Transition

The executive chapter changes October 1, 2026. The work of protecting the cemetery, restoring the record, and serving descendant families continues.

What Comes Next

- Complete remaining grant-funded deliverables by the extended December 31, 2026 project deadline.
- Continue professional analysis and documentation of the expanded GPR findings.
- Advance mapping and cemetery-record development while protecting sensitive burial information.
- Continue monument conservation, tree stewardship, infrastructure, signage, and historical-marker work.
- Strengthen long-term preservation planning and institutional continuity.
- Invite descendant families to contribute names, dates, obituaries, funeral programs, and photographs.

DESCENDANT FAMILIES

Do you believe an ancestor or loved one may be buried at Historic Crystal Memorial Gardens Cemetery? Family records can help connect probable burial locations to names and stories. Please share relevant names, dates, documents, and photographs with the organization.

A Closing Word

The September 2026 Heritage Brief marks both an ending and a continuation. Executive leadership transitions; the obligation does not. The cemetery remains sacred ground. The people buried there remain part of our shared history. And the work of preservation remains worthy of our best stewardship.

As Founder and Preservation Advisor, I will continue to stand for the same principles that launched this organization: Preserve. Honor. Document. Educate. Inspire.

With gratitude for the privilege of serving,

Andrea K. McCray

Founder, President & CEO, through September 30, 2026

Founder & Preservation Advisor, effective October 1, 2026

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

PRESERVE • HONOR • DOCUMENT • EDUCATE • INSPIRE