The background image shows a large, multi-story stone building with a prominent tower. The tower has a pointed roof with a weather vane and a crenellated top. The building is surrounded by snow-covered trees and shrubs. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall scene is a winter landscape.

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Cave Hill  
Cemetery

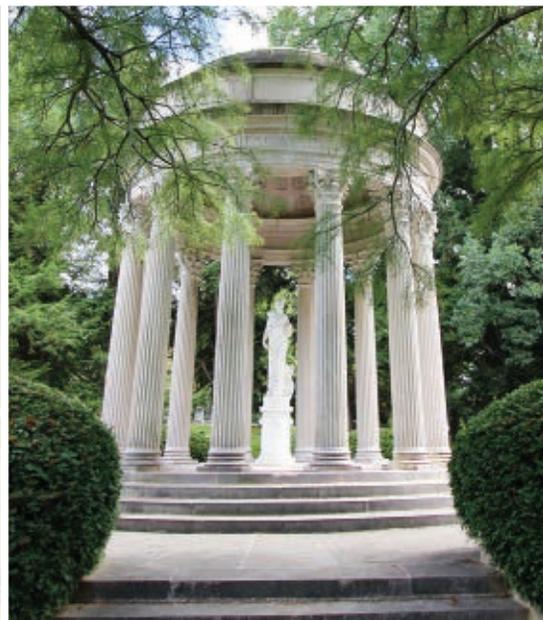
**ACE**

AMERICAN  
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AWARD  
2021

# ACE Award

By Patti Martin Bartsche



Opposite page (Clockwise from top): A member of the Cave Hill Photographers Facebook group rises early to capture the sunrise over Cave Hill's Main Admin Office, covered in fresh snow from the night before. (Photo credit: Ariel Alemany Rodriguez). Statuary, like this bronze monument, are found throughout the cemetery grounds. (Photo credit: Sarah Schaffner). Florence Satterwhite's final resting place is the largest monument in the cemetery. (Photo courtesy of Cave Hill Cemetery). A variety of wildlife, including foxes, make their home at Cave Hill Cemetery. (Photo credit: Lee Payne)

# Cave Hill Cemetery

Louisville, Kentucky

# the Winner

Were Louisville's city leaders of 1846 to walk the grounds of Cave Hill Cemetery today, they would find a large, beautiful and welcoming green space, a healthy and diverse arboretum with beehives, pollinator gardens, and thousands more grave lots than in their day.

They would be reassured by Cave Hill's continued evolution and responsiveness to both its mission and community. The result of their work and vision, as well as the diligence of those who followed, is a Victorian rural, garden-style cemetery that reflects the style's best features and is both a model to emulate and a strong contributing member of the community.

Today, Cave Hill Cemetery's 296 acres occupy a dynamic space in the Greater Louisville community ... a space that became even more important as the COVID-19 pandemic threw the country (and the world) into chaos.

We are happy to introduce Cave Hill Cemetery as the 2021 American Cemetery Excellence Award winner.





An aerial overview of Cave Hill Cemetery's 296 acres. (Photo courtesy of Cave Hill Cemetery). Opposite page: The historic "Henry Clay Ginkgo Tree" is located in Section N at Cave Hill Cemetery. (Photo credit: Sarah Schaffner)

## The Early Years

When the city of Louisville acquired the Johnston farm property called Cave Hill in 1846, a cemetery was not part of the original plan. Rather the city's principal interest was the property's stone quarries. But plans changed when it became apparent that the proposed Louisville and Frankfort Railroad would not run through the property as had been anticipated.

The original farm owner's brick house became the city's "pest house" – an isolated home for patients displaced and suffering from contagious diseases. With death an all-too-frequent visitor, city leaders recognized the need to build a graveyard.

By the mid-1800s, society had shed early Puritan concepts about death as something to be feared and abhorred. Death was a transition as opposed to an end, and it came frequently to Pest House's residents at Cave Hill. The bodies of those who died there were too often donated to medical schools as cadavers or buried in shabby, neglected plots and yards that many times themselves spread

diseases. But as attitudes toward death shifted, people found solace in the idea that a beloved family member could be buried in a beautiful, natural setting.

When the mayor and city council commissioned the cemetery, they did not set out to create a garden cemetery, even though the style was becoming increasingly popular in America's large cities. This emerging cemetery design began in Europe because of the vision, work and writings of Scottish horticulturist John Claudius Loudon. Fortunately for Louisville's future, city officials appointed a committee that ultimately selected as the cemetery's first superintendent Edmund Francis Lee (1811-1857), a civil engineer with firsthand experience of Loudon's work.

Lee convinced city leaders to embrace Cave Hill's natural features, which they had considered unsuitable for burial space. Lee imagined a natural environment that would offer balance and contrast with the surrounding cityscape. He envisioned gently curving roads winding up to the hilltop promontories, which

would be primary burial sites. The natural contours of the land would guide the layout of ponds and spaces planted with trees bringing to life Loudon's arboretum concept. Country gardens would provide a natural backdrop for burial lots and monuments.

Cave Hill Cemetery's founders established a space that would be sought out for its park-like setting and contemplative environment – a place where families and friends could commemorate their loved ones surrounded by an intentional collection of art and natural beauty. Like other cemeteries of the period, Cave Hill would utilize the graceful and elegant rural garden-style of the era, bolstered by careful planning and pragmatic management, to carry the cemetery into the future.

## The Present

Today, Cave Hill is being led by Gwen Mooney. Selected after a nationwide search, Mooney was named president and CEO in 2015, becoming Cave Hill's sixth president – and first female executive in the cemetery's history.

“Cave Hill is truly a gem for the city of Louisville and the state of Kentucky,” Mooney said. “It tells the stories of what Louisville was at the time of its founding, what it has been over the years and what it is becoming.”

As Mooney and J. Michael Higgs, Cave Hill Heritage Foundation Inc. manager, acknowledged in their nomination letter for the award, operating a 173-year-old institution comes with major challenges that require innovative solutions.

The cemetery’s challenges are ongoing, Mooney and Higgs noted, especially when some of its infrastructure is as old as the institution itself. The evolution of the grounds, operations and community service programs at Cave Hill to meet today’s challenges exemplifies innovation and creativity. To ensure success, the cemetery works together with its nonprofit arm, Cave Hill Heritage Foundation.

Founded in 2005, the Cave Hill Heritage Foundation is dedicated to the restoration of historic monuments and structures, preservation of the arboretum setting, and providing community education and awareness.

As Louisville grew in the mid-1800s, Cave Hill Cemetery was gradually surrounded by what are now historic neighborhoods. Originally a working farm with a few groves of trees, Cave Hill has evolved into an arboretum of more than 9,000 trees. Most of the trees, Mooney explained, have been intentionally planted and were chosen to compliment the hardscape and the shape and contour of the land as well as to add aesthetic appeal.

In 2014, Cave Hill was certified as a Level II Arboretum through the ArbNet accreditation program. Working with the Davey Tree Expert Co., the cemetery completed an inventory of the property’s trees in January 2021. Davey Tree’s consulting arborist counted and identified every tree on the grounds, pinpointing locations, species/variety, age, condition and other characteristics, to create a digitized map of the arboretum. The inventory is one of the first steps in the foundation’s



plan to apply to ArbNet for accreditation as a Level III Arboretum, a major goal in 2022, Higgs said.

Today, visitors come to Cave Hill from across the city and beyond to walk, enjoy the outdoors, and reflect or meditate in a calm and tranquil environment. Spending time in a well-cared-for green space has measurable health benefits that are now being studied and quantified by public health researchers associated with the green health movement. Cave Hill Heritage Foundation is partnering with the University of Louisville’s Green Heart Project, which will investigate these theories. The cemetery will serve as the laboratory for university researchers to explore the effects of time spent in green spaces, particularly those that share the physical characteristics of Cave Hill, Higgs said.

While many of Cave Hill’s most majestic monuments and mausoleums are more than 100 years old, not all these monuments have endowments created by families to provide funds for their upkeep.

Finding the funds to provide maintenance is one of the challenges of Cave Hill Heritage Foundation. To carry out its mission to preserve the past for the future, the foundation

uses a combination of fundraising techniques that include direct donor appeals, community-wide appeals and grant applications.

And as part of its community education mission, the foundation offers tours, programs and educational resources to the public and to area school students and teachers. Creative social media endeavors, strategic marketing, and high-quality online/print materials demonstrate the dedication of the cemetery and foundation to enriching the community and the lives of its residents.

## Planning and Management

Combining traditional cemetery management methods with an innovative team structure contributes to the cemetery’s success, Mooney said. Core teams that work on specific sets of tasks are key to the successful operations of the foundation as well as the cemetery, and the needs of the organizations’ administrative, foundation. The division of labor, Mooney added, results in better property and organizational management.

As an example, to tend the arboretum and perform maintenance tasks, the cemetery staff is divided into core teams with specific assignments and training. Some have the



**Management team at Cave Hill Cemetery: (Sitting, from left) Kayla Wessling, marketing & PR director; Sarah Schaffner, horticulture & landscape manager; Gwen Mooney, president & CEO; Michael Higgs, Cave Hill Heritage Foundation manager; Roger Martin, head arborist. (Back row) Andy Futrell, monument shop manager; Glen Mills, turf & general crew, facilities property & project manager; Chris Rowan, senior vice president & CFO; Lew Napier, sexton interment coordinator; Lee Payne, customer service & security team manager; Bill Evans, monument/markers team leader. Opposite page (clockwise from top): The Cave Hill Heritage Foundation offers a variety of tours throughout the year. Painting classes at Cave Hill provide a new perspective of the cemetery. The Cocktails by the Lake event offers a delightful culinary and fellowship opportunity as attendees celebrate the history of Cave Hill Cemetery. (Photos courtesy of Cave Hill Cemetery)**

specialized training needed to maintain burial lots and monuments with endowments. Other teams perform lawn and general property maintenance. Still other teams ensure that monuments are repaired with careful precision. Cave Hill’s certified arborists closely monitor the health of the tree canopy, optimizing its ability to have a positive impact on the area’s air quality. Horticultural staff ensure that the balance of the cemetery’s flora is healthy, diverse and complimentary of the arboretum and hardscape.

“These teams are vital to the care provided to the cemetery’s 296 acres,” Mooney said.

Mooney said the team concept that Cave Hill embraces is innovative. Working in teams enables the cemetery to operate in an intentional way, with staff members bringing their skills to the tasks they are best suited to perform.

### COVID-19 and Cave Hill

The teamwork concept was vital when the COVID-19 pandemic became a reality in March 2020.

“At the very beginning of COVID, we pulled our management team together immediately and talked about everything – how were we going to protect our employees, how were we going to protect the public,” Mooney said.

Equally important, Mooney added, “was making sure that through the pandemic – no matter how long it was going to last – that we would keep the gates of Cave Hill Cemetery open.”

The decision to keep the gates open was an easy one.

“In talks with the management team, we all agreed how could we not let people come into this beautiful cemetery and enjoy everything Cave Hill has to offer,” Mooney said.

The decision proved to be a popular one.

“We saw a huge influx of people walking through our gates ... people who had never been here before,” Mooney said. “The feedback was so positive.”

With its close to 300 acres, Cave Hill was able to serve the community in a variety of ways.

“People came in to walk the grounds, to find a place of reflection, to learn more about the people buried at Cave Hill,” Higgs said. “We had great informational maps that guided people through the cemetery.”

People used the cemetery, Higgs added, as a place to destress and relax. “We all had this notion that working from home was less stressful than being in the confine of an office,” Higgs said. “And as many people found, that’s not always necessarily true. The cemetery proved to be a

depresser, where people could come and let the weight of the world whisk them away.”

While the cemetery remained open, it did adhere to all local, state and federal guidelines and restrictions, including limiting the number of people at graveside services and cancelling scheduled events and programs.

When Cave Hill was unable to hold its hugely popular Memorial Day public event in May 2020, which included the mass placement and retrieval of gravesite flags by volunteers for the 5,863 veterans buried at the cemetery, cemetery staff placed wreaths at every grave.

“While we couldn’t have the public Memorial Day event that we usually have, we did invite everyone who wanted to honor veterans to come in and pay their respects,” Mooney said.

To mark the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment – granting women the right to vote – in August 2020, the Cave Hill Heritage Foundation, in partnership with the Louisville Metro Office for Women, the League of Women Voters, Frazier History Museum, and Filson Historical Society, produced the 36-page “Louisville Women and the Suffrage Movement.” Along with providing a comprehensive history of the 19th amendment, the publication offers profiles of the suffragists buried at Louisville’s four cemeteries, including the 15 women buried at Cave Hill.

And while in-person programming was curtailed through the end of 2020, Cave Hill did host a contactless free tree giveaway in November 2020. Three hundred trees – Persimmon, Bur Oak, Swamp White Oak and Nuttall Oak – were given away as part of cemetery’s initiative to “plant a tree and help us grow a greener Louisville.”

Earlier this year, Cave Hill resumed its in-person programs and events – with COVID-19 protocols in place. Visitors were once again able to tour the grounds to learn about the individuals who shaped the early history of Louisville; hear the horticultural story of Cave Hill (including a behind-the-scenes look at what



goes into maintaining the landscape); learn more about the literary figures buried at Cave Hill; and attend a lecture on 19th-century tombstones.

“We sold out almost every event,” Mooney said. “While we needed to scale back a bit, people were excited that we were able to resume programming; after nearly a year, we are all happy to be back.”

And after a year’s absence, the foundation once again hosted its highly popular “Cocktails by The Lake” fundraiser.

“It was great to be able to return to our in-person events,” Higgs said. “Everyone had a phenomenal time.”

An unexpected positive of the pandemic was the Cave Hill Cemetery Photographers group on Facebook.

Although not associated or run by Cave Hill Cemetery, the group became hugely popular during the pandemic.

“When the group started (pre-pandemic) there were only a handful

of members,” Kayla Wessling, Cave Hill’s marketing & PR director explained. “Once the pandemic started, the number of members grew, and people headed to the cemetery to take pictures.”

What is interesting is no two of the photographs on the page capture the same image, a nod not only to the cemetery’s expansive grounds, but also to the different perspectives of visitors.

### On Sure Financial Footing

Though financial stability can be challenging for any organization, Cave Hill has historically been and continues to be financially sound. To make certain that Cave Hill remains a viable and vibrant organization and that its policies continue, Cave Hill sets aside 50% of sales revenue for preservation. This practice originated in 1890 with the creation of the Cave Hill Investment Co. to ensure the long-term sustainability of Cave Hill so that future generations share in the benefits the

cemetery affords the community. By consistently practicing this policy, Cave Hill survived the Depression era as well as other periods of financial distress.

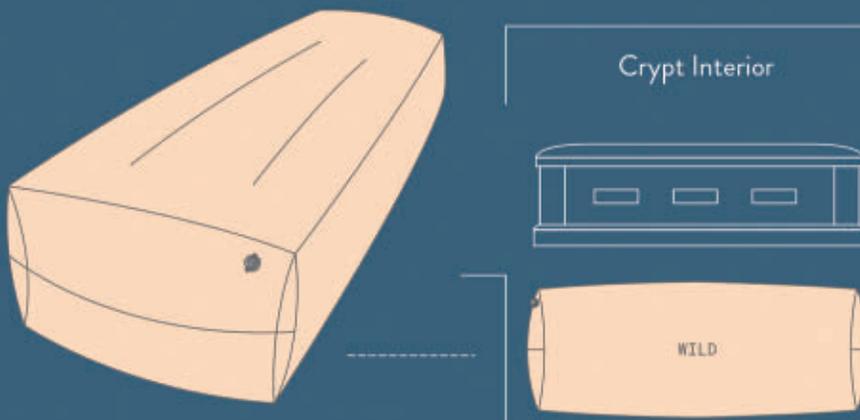
“The cemetery will continue doing what it does so well: providing thoughtful and supportive funeral services; maintaining strong and careful arboretum management, which includes stewardship of all flora and fauna on the grounds; caring for the markers, monuments, mausoleums, and other hardscape that offer tangible historical records,” Higgs noted in the nomination application. “The foundation will continue to pursue its mission, to preserve the past for the future, by designing and overseeing projects that support the cemetery and by developing unique educational opportunities that tell the stories of the cemetery and of those buried there.”

### A Community Resource

Through the years, Cave Hill Cemetery has successfully built relationships with civic and nonprofit

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organizations across Kentucky. These collaborations and partnerships offer unique opportunities to make an impact in the areas of education, environment, history and public health.

The cemetery collaborates with other organizations in the community that share its mission and purpose, such as Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, Yew Dell Botanical Gardens and Waterfront Botanical Gardens. The organizations share staff during weather emergencies, exchange plant and equipment resources when needed, and offer each other expertise, counsel, and plant and tree stock.

The foundation works with the Filson Historical Society, the Frazier Museum and the Louisville Historical League to ensure that historic presentations and materials are accurate and engaging.

Cave Hill Cemetery and foundation staff are also involved in various community organizations and actively support public services such as the fire, police and emergency medical service departments.

In addition, the cemetery and the foundation each seek to be responsive to community needs by offering community residents the latest trends in funeral service, including cremation options.

In the South, attitudes toward cremation have lagged those in the rest of the nation, Mooney and Higgs pointed out. A paradigm shift, though, is underway for a variety of reasons, including the increased costs of funerals and burial lots, changes in social mores surrounding death, and an increase in the number of unchurched persons in our society.

“In 2000, the adaptive reuse of a former cemetery lodge resulted in the creation of the city’s largest columbarium, providing 750 niches for cremated remains,” Mooney said. For a smaller investment than the traditional inground burial, families can give their loved ones a permanent place to rest. Cave Hill also offers additional rights of interment of cremated remains by in-ground burials or in columbarium walls in a

garden setting near the cemetery’s open-air chapel.

The Cave Hill Heritage Foundation has also led the way to some of Cave Hill’s most innovative activity. In 2010, Cave Hill developed a relationship with a local master beekeeper. Within a few years, Cave Hill had hives of its own tended by cemetery and foundation staff trained as beekeepers. The foundation raised funds to create a state-of-the-art apiary and sought and gained certification as a Monarch (butterfly) Waystation – the largest in Kentucky. Cave Hill’s beekeepers harvest honey in the newly adapted honey house. The honey is shared with donors and volunteers and sold in the community at local farmers markets.

Three years ago, the foundation developed a bereavement program, partnering with a counselor from Hosparus Louisville. “Walking Through Grief” includes a variety of activities that offer people various ways to cope with the loss of someone special in their lives.

Activities include structured walks that visit key places in the cemetery, group sessions, book discussions, and a commemorative service at the end of each cycle.

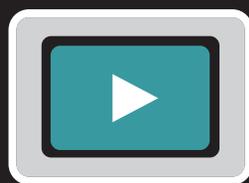
### Looking Toward the Future

Mooney and Higgs describe Cave Hill as a unique and beautiful urban space that is faithful to its origins as a rural garden-style cemetery influenced by the Victorian era.

It is also, they say, a museum, a gallery of monumental art set in a carefully tended urban forest. Today, the cemetery represents the community’s history, struggles, and triumphs.

According to Mooney, with continuing support and diligent long-term strategic planning, the cemetery, with its arboretum and art and tranquil ambience, will offer the community a place of beauty, solace, and enrichment for many decades to come.

“The future is tremendously bright,” she said. “We have so many things to look forward to.” •



## DIGITAL CONTENT

Learn about some of the famous people buried at Cave Hill Cemetery: [www.acm-digital.com](http://www.acm-digital.com)

