



Richard Bie, president and CEO of Catholic Cemeteries of Long Island, at the site of the new Queen of Peace Cemetery in Old Westbury Wednesday.

Newsday

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Melville, NY 11747

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New Catholic cemetery opens

Old Westbury site debuts after lengthy process, will hold up to 200,000 plots

BY BART JONES
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It took 27 years and a struggle that endured through the tenure of four bishops, but a new Roman Catholic cemetery is finally open in Old Westbury.

The Queen of Peace Cemetery, which will have up to 200,000 burial plots, is opening just in time, as the other Catholic cemetery in Nassau County is nearly full — partly due to the coronavirus pandemic, officials said.

“We are absolutely delighted to be at this point,” said Richard Bie, president and CEO of Catholic Cemeteries of Long Island. “It couldn’t come at a more critical time.”

Holy Rood Cemetery, about two miles away, is nearly out of space, even though workers added about 800 new plots, partly to accommodate victims of COVID-19, Bie said. Only 50 are left.

During the height of the pandemic in April, the number of burials at Holy Rood doubled or tripled each day, from the usual five or six to an “unprecedented” 19 or 20, he said.

“If we didn’t have this ceme-

tery coming into existence now, we wouldn’t be able to serve the Catholic faithful of Nassau County,” Bie said. “No one else is building new cemeteries. That’s the beauty of what we are doing here. This is historical for us.”

Church and cemetery officials held a groundbreaking ceremony Sept. 15 as construction on buildings there began.

But the first burial at Queen of Peace took place May 14, when Elizabeth O’Sullivan, 79, of Williston Park, whose dying wish, according to her husband Denis — to be put to rest there — was fulfilled.

So far, a total of five people have been buried at the new cemetery, even though a chapel as well as administration and maintenance buildings are not expected to open until 2021, Bie said.

He added that the opening had to be pushed up because of the pandemic.

Bishop John Barres consecrated the land — a former horse farm — with holy water in May, allowing for the burials to begin.

“This beautiful Catholic cemetery and our wonderful plans for it is an expression of

our belief in the triumph of the Holy Cross in our lives and in our families’ lives, especially at moments of death,” Barres said at last week’s groundbreaking. “And especially when people come to this sacred ground and eventually this beautiful chapel to express their faith.”

Barres continued: “Think of all the Catholics who will come here and will be moved by the chapel, statuary and all the dimensions of religious art they will experience here.”

The property has a long and convoluted history.

The church bought it in 1993 at a public auction after the federal government seized the land following an FBI sting operation against the owners, believed to be linked to the Colombo organized crime family, according to court records.

Before that, in the late-19th to the mid-20th century, the land was owned by the Hitchcock family, which was prominent in polo, and trained racehorses on what was then known as Broad Hollow Farm.

Some neighboring residents were concerned about increased traffic and other issues a cemetery might bring, and the church’s efforts to obtain the proper approvals dragged on.

Years of litigation between the church and the Village of

Old Westbury ended in 2016 with a \$7.5 million settlement paid to the diocese. The Catholic Cemeteries group says it has addressed residents’ concerns, prohibiting funerals on Sundays, putting the main entrance on Jericho Turnpike, and building six-foot-high berms to shield the cemetery from its residential surroundings.

Former longtime Old Westbury Mayor Fred Carillo, whose last day was the same day as the groundbreaking, said the arrival of Bie as head of Catholic Cemeteries a few years ago helped break the logjam surrounding the project.

He called Bie “very reliable” and “cooperative,” as he gave his endorsement to the cemetery finally opening.

The diocese bought the land when Bishop John McGann led the faithful on Long Island. Three more bishops came after that, with Barres currently in charge.

Catholic Cemeteries, which also runs two cemeteries in Suffolk County, now operates independently of the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

The newest cemetery assures the church that it will be able to accommodate the faithful on Long Island, which is home to 1.5 million Catholics, Bie said.

THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1789 President George Washington signed a Judiciary Act establishing America’s federal court system and creating the post of attorney general.

1869 Thousands of businessmen were ruined in a Wall Street panic known as “Black Friday” after financiers Jay Gould and James Fisk attempted to corner the gold market.

1890 The president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Wilford Woodruff, wrote a manifesto renouncing the practice of plural marriage, or polygamy.

1955 President Dwight D. Eisenhower suffered a heart attack while on vacation in Denver.

1960 The USS Enterprise, the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, was launched at Newport News, Virginia.

2001 President George W. Bush ordered a freeze on the assets of 27 people and organizations with suspected links to terrorism, including Islamic militant Osama bin Laden, and urged other nations to do likewise.