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Cemetery cleanup needs volunteers

by [Lisa Fogarty](#) , Editor

Last year, Bayside Cemetery in Ozone Park made news for all the wrong reasons. Despite its status as an unequivocal city relic that houses nearly 35,000 graves of Jewish veterans of the Civil War, the burial ground has become known for the litter strewn along graves and outside the cemetery's gate, graffiti on its walls and signage and an unresolved class action lawsuit filed by John Lucker, whose grandparents are buried in the facility.

The suit, which Lucker's attorney said is currently being refiled in state court after a judge issued a decision last week that there is no federal court jurisdiction for the case, was filed against the cemetery's owner, Congregation Shaare Zedek, whom family allege failed to live up to its contracted agreement to maintain the gravesites. The suit was brought about amidst the discovery that Bayside had been severely neglected and that, in addition to its overgrown weeds and piled-up garbage, many mausoleums had been broken into and destroyed and coffins smashed.

While it may take a great deal of effort to return Bayside Cemetery to its yesteryear state, Councilman Eric Ulrich (R-Ozone Park), in partnership with Mayor Mike Bloomberg's Community Affairs Unit, the Community Association for Jewish At-risk Cemeteries and Our Neighbors Civic of Ozone Park, has called on residents to join him on Sunday, Oct. 25 to help clean up garbage and debris along the exterior walls of the cemetery. As part of the Graffiti Free NYC program, the city will remove graffiti vandalism along the ground's outer wall facing Liberty Avenue.

Members from Congregation Shaare Zedek are also expected to attend. According to Ulrich, they have been cooperative and helpful in removing litter from both inside and outside Bayside Cemetery.

"The cemetery should receive the respect it deserves as the final resting ground for thousands of Jewish people," Ulrich said. "It's going to be beautiful."

Volunteers who wish to help in the clean-up should meet at 10 a.m. Sunday at Bayside Cemetery, located on Liberty Avenue and 84th Street.



For several years, Bayside Cemetery in Ozone Park has been the subject of controversy revolving around both an ongoing lawsuit concerning the conditions of gravesites and tombstones and litter and graffiti in and around the burial ground. PHOTO BY

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