

GOTHAM GIGS



ROSE at the Harbeck Mausoleum, perhaps the most ornate at Woodlawn.

DUCK BENS

MITCH ROSE

BORN Miami

RESIDES Dobbs Ferry, Westchester County

EDUCATION Associate degree in horticulture, Gainsville Community College; bachelor's in business administration, University of Central Florida; mortuary science degree, Ogeechee Technical College

GIGANTIC GROUNDS

Woodlawn has 17 miles of roads within it, more than 150,000 monuments, 1,300 private mausoleums and more than 6,000 large trees.

MUSICAL TRIBUTE

Every June Woodlawn has traditionally hosted a jazz concert on cemetery grounds to honor all the jazz greats buried there, including Duke Ellington and Miles Davis.

New life at the cemetery

Woodlawn's CEO keeps famous names alive and focuses on worker development

BY MIRIAM KREININ SOUCCAR

History buffs can celebrate the lives of famous trailblazers such as Celia Cruz, aka the Queen of Salsa, and suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton—all by visiting their graves. Woodlawn Cemetery & Conservancy in the Bronx offers trolley tours that highlight the accomplishments of the notable names buried there.

"We'll always be a cemetery first, but we are trying to become more than a cemetery," said Mitch Rose, president and CEO. He started in the funeral and cemetery business in the late '80s and came to Woodlawn 10 years ago. "We're an outdoor museum, a historical society and an interactive learning environment."

Although tours are on hold for now, Woodlawn's events traditionally attract more than 100,000 visitors annually from around the world

to the 400-acre cemetery, which was established in 1863. It was named a National Historic Landmark in 2011.

Rose took a job in a cemetery in Florida by chance after college because he liked landscaping and working outdoors. He learned it was a meaningful career path one day when he was preparing an infant burial site. He soon discovered that it had been commissioned by a couple he and his wife knew from Lammaze class.

"This taught me how life can change in a moment and how serving a family at such an emotional time is more than a profession," Rose said.

Though Rose guides more than 3,000 families a year through the burial or cremation of their loved ones, he is just as focused on Woodlawn's role as an educational institution.

In 2015 he started a workforce development program in connection

with other nonprofits to train underprivileged men and women from the five boroughs in construction work. Each year 20 high school (or the equivalent) graduates go through a 10-week curriculum teaching how to assemble scaffolding on the cemetery's 150,000 monuments. At some point this year, Woodlawn plans to start an additional training program for people to learn landscaping.

The programs are funded through the conservancy's \$1 million annual budget, which is raised through government and private sources. The cemetery has a \$15 million annual budget, which comes from the burial fees for new clients. The nonprofit has a \$200 million endowment, which helps ensure that the cemetery can help young people make a good living.

"We are leading the way to show that cemeteries can do much more than their main mission," Rose said. ■

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