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A bittersweet reopening at Burr Oak cemetery

BURR OAK CEMETERY | 'It couldn't have been a better day to let me in'

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November 20, 2009

BY LAUREN FITZPATRICK SouthtownStar

Letting the tears flow down her cheeks, Rochelle Briscoe boarded a shuttle bus to Burr Oak Cemetery on Thursday morning with a balloon and a bag of flowers.

The timing for the reopening of the scandal-ridden Alsip cemetery couldn't be better, the South Holland woman said.

"It's always sad, but it couldn't have been a better day to let me in," she said.

Thursday was the birthday of her tall, handsome son Lawrence, who died in 2003 at age 33.

And though Briscoe cried for her loss, she was pleased about the improvements she saw at the cemetery, where four former employees are accused of digging up graves to resell plots.

"The roads were so raggedy in there, but they fixed them. It's a big improvement," she said, adding she'll keep her plot next to her son's after all.

Four months after Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart announced the destruction of about 200 graves, Burr Oak's heavy new wrought iron gates opened to the public Thursday.

Unlike the desperate thousands who showed up at the cemetery in July to make sure their loved ones' graves had not been destroyed in an alleged grave-reselling scandal, a slow trickle of people rode shuttle buses to Burr Oak from a nearby office set up as a help center.

Howard Korenthal, a business turnaround consultant named as chief operating officer, and his adviser, Roman Szabelski of Catholic Cemeteries, are reopening the cemetery in sections.

"We decided to open this way for families who aren't quite sure where their loved ones' graves are so we can give them a little more attention," Szabelski said. "So far it seems to be working well."

The entire cemetery will be reopened to the public Nov. 27.

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demon wrote:

It certainly was a sin how these gravesites were destroyed, and I feel badly for the families that had to experience such a terrible thing. Maybe the dead can really now rest in peace for eternity

11/20/2009 11:16 AM CST on suntimes.com

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