

## A Cemetery So Popular, People Are Dying To Get In! Palm Springs Cemetery District



The Palm Springs Cemetery District (PSCD) operates two cemeteries: the Welwood Murray Cemetery in Palm Springs, and the Desert Memorial Park (DMP) in Cathedral City. Many prominent civic and

community leaders, as well as many famous desert pioneers, are buried in the Welwood Murray Cemetery; while celebrities such as Sonny Bono and Frank Sinatra have chosen Desert Memorial Park as their final resting place.

*California Special District* talked to Kathleen Jurasky, general manager of the Palm Springs Cemetery District, about what makes this cemetery district special and how it has grown over the last 100 years.

**Congratulations on your 20th anniversary as district manager of the Palm Springs Cemetery District. What about the Palm Springs Cemetery District has kept you going for the last 20 years?**

Thanks, thanks! But I would be the first to tell you that I could never do this on my own; it takes an amazing Board of Trustees to be open to new ideas and the wisdom to act on those ideas. I also have to acknowledge my staff who gives me the daily operational support that it takes to be the success that we are. But personally, it is the nature of making a huge difference to a large number of people that come to us at a very difficult time of their lives and facilitating a positive experience for them.

**What is special about cemetery districts?**

It's all about the service beyond the product that we provide. It's about the support, the compassion, the experience that is so imperative while helping others navigate through the emotions of making final arrangements for their loved ones. Our goal is to assure handling one of the most difficult times in their lives is as easy as possible.

**This year marks the 60th anniversary of Desert Memorial Park. How has this cemetery grown over the years under your leadership and are there any plans for changes in the near future?**

We have strived to enhance the experience of our visitors and families over the years through a variety of ways. We have expanded services to include Saturday and Sunday internments, conducted multiple exterior renovations and property upgrades including a new sidewalk, landscape improvements to support water conservation, and built a new, more modern administration building. Before the old administration building was removed, the District allowed local fire departments to use it for search and rescue training.

In addition, PSCD has earned the following achievements: Accredited as a District of Distinction and has also earned the District Transparency Certificate of Excellence, both through the Special District Leadership Foundation; First in the nation to have a memorial installation dedicated in honor of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender veterans; Recipient of the David Goldware Friend of the Veteran award from Riverside County; 2015 Nominee for Business of the Year in Cathedral City; and 2015 Nominee for Small Business Innovator of the Year in Cathedral City.

**Visiting the grave sites of prominent individuals from history has become a part of tourism across the globe. Does the district provide tours or a guide for visitors to identify the many celebrities and desert pioneers that are buried on the grounds?**

We have an "Interments of Interest" handout that includes a cemetery map, the name of the deceased, date of birth and death, cemetery name and grave location. This information is also posted in a marquee outside the District office, and a supply of handouts is kept in a bin below the marquee. This limits the number of visitors inside the office, thus reducing staff being interrupted.

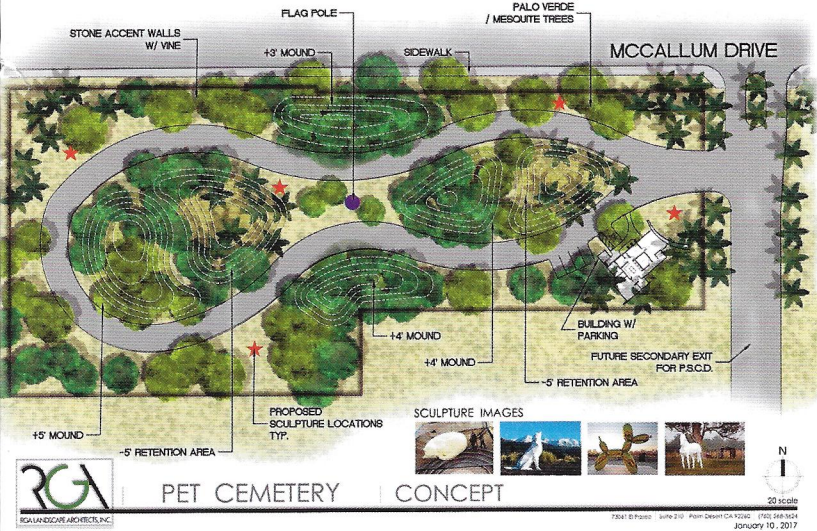
**Does the Palm Springs Cemetery District host any events in conjunction with Memorial Day? What other events does the cemetery host on an annual basis?**

Yes, we host Memorial Day services annually. We also host a Dia de los Muertos/Day of the Dead event, which started four years ago and features mariachi bands, folkloric dancers, arts and crafts, face painting, student art contest, community altar, and food vendors. This has turned into an event that the community looks forward to each year.

# Palm Springs Cemetery District

Established: 1917  
District Size: 504 square miles  
Population: 155,205

Location: Riverside  
Website: [www.pscemetery.com](http://www.pscemetery.com)  
Budget: \$1,041,669



The Palm Springs Cemetery District is the first public cemetery in California to offer a burial site for pets. How did this come about and what is the expected date of completion?

Public cemeteries by law can't operate a pet cemetery, so after more than 12 years discussing the possibility of changing these laws without success, the District's attorney suggested a non-profit be formed. The Pet Memorial Park Cemetery, a 501(c)(3), was formed last year and will be built with donations. We do not have a completion date just yet since we are still in the planning stages.

The PCSD Board of Trustees has designated five-acres of District land for the Pet Memorial Park Cemetery. The landscape, building, and interior design services for the cemetery have been donated by different agencies. In addition, a survey of the cemetery site, project management services, and legal services have been donated as well for the development of Pet Memorial Park Cemetery. ■