



TULARE PUBLIC CEMETERY

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Anisabel Fernandes
1924 E. Alpine Avenue
Tulare, California 93274

July 15, 2022

Dear Ms. Fernandes,

First and foremost, on behalf of Tulare Public Cemetery District the board members, employees and myself would like to express our condolences to you and your family for the loss of your father, Ildebrando Almeida.

Thank you for reaching out to us in your July 11, 2022 email and expressing your feelings about the circumstances surrounding the burial of your father, Ildebrando Almeida. The Tulare Public Cemetery District is committed to improving the experience for our clients, and feedback such as yours is important to that process. Your email raised a number of concerns and I wanted to address each of those to the best of my ability.

Your complaint about the conditions of the gravesite at the time of the burial are well taken. We have made great strides with our groundskeeping staff to improve the overall condition and appearance at the cemetery. However, some areas necessarily take more effort and resources to properly rehabilitate, which stretches their ability to ensure any given area will be as tidy and free of weeds as we would prefer. We apologize that your father's grave and surrounding area was not up to your expectations at the time of the burial. We have recently supplemented our regular work force with temporary workers to continue our improvements efforts in those regards.

You expressed disappointment that a canopy was not provided. We want our guests to be comfortable, so the cemetery contract for burial services does call for a canopy. However, the "Information for Burial.." sheet that was included in your contract, specifically states that it is provided "unless weather is more comfortable without one" which is usually when natural shade is available or at times it is an overcast. Canopies are not used in shady areas because they can create even further restrictions on people's movement and view. Your father's gravesite was naturally shady and therefore a canopy was not included as part of the services. I have included pictures of that specific area taken on July 14, 2022 at 11:08am – 11:14am, which is about the same time of your father's service held on June 24, 2022. I have included pictures from our security camera of the arrival time of Miller's which was at 10:46am and departing at 11:57am, which is after the lowering of the casket and closing of the vault which is usually about a 20-30 minute process. Guests had already started to depart about 11:27am from the

area. I have included Tulare weather for the 24th day of June and time of 10:56 am which shows 85' degrees which would have been time during service and 89' degrees at the time Miller's had departed. Temperature is measured in direct sun and not shaded area which is cooler temperatures where your fathers service was held. If you disagree about the shade available in the area, I am happy to meet with you at the gravesite so you may point out where it was insufficient.

We have checked the area of the gravesite for holes and the grounds are uneven throughout the cemetery based on headstone outlines, some dry areas, and the uneven grounds that a tree tends to cause from roots and some debris. As you mentioned, there are no gopher holes, our crew works hard to ensure that they are not a problem. I did notice that the grass in that area is a bit uneven due to the shady environment in which it grows. Perhaps that is what you meant? We are constantly looking for ways to improve the quality of the grass. There has been considerable improvement, but there is always room to grow. If you would like to walk the site with me and point out areas of grass that were of particular concern to the pallbearers, I would be happy to do so.

We are sorry that you came back to the gravesite at an inopportune time and found the grave in what appeared to be a disheveled state. The groundsmen do their best to mound the dirt and then will lay the flower stands on the grave. It is a process that they have done for years due to the fact of possible stands falling over and the causing extreme damage to the flowers on the stands. So each burial the stands are laid out carefully. You mentioned that you arrived with the flowers on the grave so I am unsure of why there are pictures without the flowers laid out on the grave. The pictures also show the dirt was scattered and that is not how it site was left when the groundsmen completed their job.

There was also a picture with a muddy grave, the sprinklers are set to come on at night for the grounds, which also helps settle the soil for new burials. That must have been when the picture, that appears to be taken by Mr. Aguilar on June 25th, was taken in early morning after a night of watering that area. Again, that picture shows no flowers on the grave, which again was not done by our employees because they left the grave with the flowers laid down on the grave.

On Monday, June 27th, Mr. Aguilar came in and spoke with me about concerns about the cemetery grounds and mentioned about the headstone that was in incorrect place for your service. He also mentioned that he was out there on Saturday the 25th, checking on the area of your father's grave and addressed concerns about the flowers on the grave and compacting of the grave. We are unsure of who moved the flowers but after my meeting with Mr. Aguilar I did go out to the area and flowers were on the grave which is not how the pictures were reflecting. There seems to have been a lot of action in that area so seeing the footprints on the grave could have been a number of people, we are also open to the public and unfortunately cannot control the actions of others. It is unfortunate but we have had numerous issues with vandalism in recent months. Now as for headstone, you will notice the area your father's grave is, is much narrower compared to some of the other sections. There are circumstances that require the crew to move a headstone to accommodate a vault to be placed in a grave with the equipment. That was the case in this situation, unfortunately the headstone that was moved was old and concrete was cracked due to aging so we moved it for safety concerns but lined it up with the other headstones in that row and called the memorial company to come out the very same day and made a repair order. I have included a picture of where it was placed which shows it lined up with the graves in the same row.

As for the mound of dirt, the process of getting the correct amount soil, and proper compaction of the ground, takes several days. There is a certain amount of compaction that is done to a burial because of

the vault we are extremely careful to not compact with too much pressure because it can cause the vault to break. We allow for more of a natural process along with some compaction with equipment. I have also included information about the process and why a small mound is left loosely above the grounds to give time to settle. Grave subsidence is due in part to the loose and fine nature of the soil at the cemetery, and simply a challenge that all cemeteries deal with. On the day of the burial, extra soil is mounded and water applied to allow the soil to settle and fill the air pockets and voids that exist below the surface. More soil may be added as needed as settling occurs. Flowers are removed and replaced as part of this process and are never buried or destroyed on the first day. But, we had not removed any flowers because the service was on Friday and our crew would not be back until the following Monday and continue the process of filling in more soil as needed. Unfortunately, you visited the site at a stage of this process that was not visually appealing. Again, we invite you to come to the site and view the progress of the grave. You will find that it is coming along nicely, and well within expectations.

The cemetery has met its obligations and has provided a dignified resting place for your father. The vault and grave and services related to them were all provided in proper fashion in accordance with contract and the Health and Safety Code. As such, the Tulare Public Cemetery District will not be offering a refund. I have also included copy of the "Acknowledgement of Information, Policies and Procedures received for Interment Rights Owners" which you have initialed, signed and dated as received the "Information for Burial or Cremation Service & After" that states the canopy and flowers on grave setup. However, I would be happy to set up a time to view the grave in person with you and answer any questions that you might have regarding your personal experience.

Very truly yours,



Clara L. Bernardo
District Manager

Enclosures