

Cemeteries have called in the state troopers, arrested him, and parked a bulldozer on one of his clients. But innovative Mack Moore has bought his own cemetery, offers couples and close friends duplex graves, and the lowest prices around...



Photo by Pat Sullivan

Maverick Mortician

By JOCK HATFIELD
Of the Emerald

Every time a corpse goes anywhere in the country, chances are another 25¢ will go toward stalling Mack Moore's fight for a profit in the death business.

Of all industries, the death business leaves the consumer most vulnerable. If prices are too high, the main participant never complains. The next of kin are in no position to hold out for a better deal. Psychological studies have shown both the next of kin and the corpse are at their intellectual worst at burial time.

Moore, now the owner of the Chapel of Memories funeral home in Eugene, 10 years ago uncovered corruption in the industry. He charged eight Lane county cemeteries with taking advantage of their position by making excessive tombstone profits.

Moore was a reluctant mortician. Ten years ago he owned only a tombstone shop, Eugene Marble and Granite, and didn't care much what went underneath.

But eight of Lane County's prominent cemeteries started preventing him from installing grave stones. They claimed customers had to buy the stones and installation from the cemetery. This could prevent the grounds from being matted up by outside gravestone proprietors.

Moore had to fight for his cut of the gravestone market or go under. He branched out into the mortuary business to avoid bankruptcy, and took his tombstone troubles to court.

Cemeteries sell their stones at cost. The "hidden profit" comes from installation rates as much as three times higher than competitors prices. Moore charges \$25 per gravestone installation, while most local cemeteries charge prices ranging from two to three times higher. Lane Memorial Gardens charges 25¢ a tombstone square inch, which on the average tombstone comes to about \$80. Prices for West Lawn, Rest Haven, Fair Grove, Springfield Memorial, and Lane Memorial Gardens range from \$50 to \$80.

Tombstones bring in lucrative profits. In the 12 years since Moore started fighting cemeteries, Rest Haven has taken in over \$1,400,000 from gravestone sales alone. Lane Memorial has taken in over \$1 million. West Lane has taken in \$1,200,000, and Springfield Memorial has taken in

\$1,000,000.

Moore charged this revenue was taken in by excluding him from the market. He charged the cemeteries in court with monopoly, attempted monopoly and violation of federal tie-in laws and conspiracy.

"When a cemetery sells 90 to 100 percent of the tombstones on its grounds," says Moore, "I call it monopoly."

In 1972 and 1977 the federal courts agreed with Moore on one point: the cemeteries violated federal tie-in laws by linking grave sales to tombstone sales and service.

The cemeteries are not yet ready to let the issue rest in peace. Since November they have been pooling their efforts for another court tombstone battle, this time on the state level.

The four largest cemetery organizations in the country, comprising over 30 percent of the nation's corpse consignments have lent their support to the effort. The American Cemetery Association, the National Cemetery Association, the Southern Cemetery Association and the Western Cemetery Association have sent out letters to their combined members asking for a 25¢ per corpse donation. For 25¢ per corpse burial, says the letter, the contributing cemeteries can feel secure about their future.

"The future of your cemetery is at stake," warns the letter. "Your contribution to the cemetery tax fund is tax deductible. Send in your tax deductible contribution today."

The cemeteries fear the entrance of outside gravestones onto their land. They fear the Moore rulings may start a trend. Since Moore's 1977 appellate court ruling the attorney general of four states Maryland, Texas, South Carolina and Arkansas — have



Photo by Dennis Hickok

Not just anybody owns their own cemetery but then again not everyone has caused a ruckus in the death business. Mack Moore stands in his Oak Hill cemetery, where he buries corpses for the lowest going rate around.

begun proceedings to open tombstone sales to competition.

"It is clear," say cemetery spokespersons, "That all this activity can be traced to Mack Moore in Oregon."

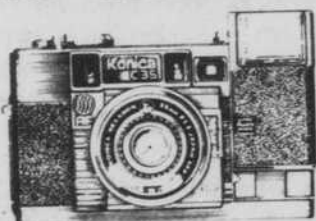
The corpse contribution scheme could mean trouble for Moore. Some of the largest cemeteries in the country, including Forest Lawn, belong to these associations, he points out. If every corpse puts in its 25¢, Moore fig-

ures his opposition may soon have over \$1 million in reserves.

The cemeteries continue to bar Moore and his tombstones from their grounds while they have the case tried again, this time on the state level. The 1977 appellate court remanded the case to lower courts to determine damages. But the cemeteries hope to have the state court reinterpret the appellate court ruling in their favor.

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