

Heritage Happenings

Newsletter of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

Spring Issue ~ Vol. 10 No. 4

April 2014

carol jean smetana, editor

Mission Statement:

Promote the historical significance, enhance the beauty, and preserve the artistic heritage of Bohemian National Cemetery

Vision:

Create an appreciation of BNC in local, national, and international audiences



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What's New with Friends of BNC

A few years ago **Martha and Chuck Cervenka** and I met with visitors from Prague at Bohemian National Cemetery to give them a tour. The first place they wanted to see was **Milan Hodža's** monument. I am sorry to say that none of us knew who he was or where his monument was located, but once they explained how important he was, we realized this man was truly remarkable! The office gave us the location, and off we went to see this most impressive gravestone.

About 40 people came to our winter meeting in January to learn more about Milan Hodža, one



Friends president Marge Sladek Stueckemann (left) with Dr. Susan Mikula, speaker at Friends January meeting, standing in front of Slovak flag at Klas Restaurant, Cicero. Photo courtesy of Frank Magallon

of the most important Slovak leaders of the first half of the twentieth century. **Dr. Susan Mikula**, professor of history and chair of the Division of Humanities at Benedictine University, told us about his pioneering work in the creation of Czecho-Slovakia in 1918. He was the first Slovak to serve as prime minister, beginning in 1935. He wrote thousands of articles and was a Slovak journalist as well. Due to the changes in the country during World War II, he came to the United States in 1941. When he died in Florida in 1944, he was buried at BNC. Although his remains were removed and repatriated to Slovakia after

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Live from BNC

Last year BNCA voted to start providing pet cremation services at the cemetery. Over the past several months, cemetery employees as well as volunteers have been working to get Bohemian National Cemetery's new pet cremation oven installed and operating. Early this year, the

cemetery tested the oven and found it to be in good working order. On February 15th, two pets were cremated, and to date there have been six pet cremations, including a turtle.

On Wednesday, January 15th, volunteers **Chuck Betzold, Chuck**

Michalek, Jerry Gaydusek, Andrew Bultas, and Chuck Betzold's friend **Jim** cleaned out the little room in back of the chimney in the crematorium/ columbarium building and prepared the walls for scraping and painting. On February 19th, the painting

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Heritage Happenings

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Manuscripts, articles, photographs, and advertisements for *Heritage Happenings* may be submitted to carol jean smetana, 167 County Road A4A, Sapello, NM 87745-5026 or emailed to her at editor@friendsofbnc.org.

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Officers of Friends of BNC

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Newsletter: carol jean smetana
Publicity: Open; would you like to
volunteer?
Special Projects: Jerry Gaydusek
Webmaster: carol jean smetana



from the editor's laptop

I received a letter last month from William Killian, which he graciously said I could share with you. William had recently been given a copy of our book *A Dear and Precious Heritage* and was thrilled to find in its pages a photograph of the monument at his uncle William Sikora's grave, a monument he had never seen before. He wrote me that his mother, Anna Sikora, had named him after her brother William. William Sikora was a captain in the Chicago Fire Department who died in the line of duty on June 16, 1925. His monument shows a man in uniform standing next to a fire hydrant.

William Killian writes: "At the time my uncle was killed, we still lived with him in Chicago. I was only six years old, and at his funeral I still remember looking out the front window to see the fire trucks filled with flowers and the firemen standing at attention, forming a bower with their swords raised as the casket came out of the house ... My mother was devastated when Uncle Bill was killed, and as a little six-year-old, I couldn't understand all the tears."

I am gratified that our book reached William and that he took the time to share with me his childhood memory. If you have a memory about the cemetery or a story about a loved one buried there, I would love to hear it. You can email me at editor@friendsofbnc.org or write me at 167 County Road A4A, Sapello, NM 87745-5026

Na shledanou!
carol jean smetana



Děkuji Vám!

Helen Gaydusek and Andy Bultas
for manning the registration table at our January meeting

Juli Nelson
for manning the book table at our January meeting

Welcome to Our New Members!

Anabeth Placko Dollins ... Pittsburgh, PA
Lillian Gustafson ... Lincolnshire, IL
Dennis Houdek ... Evansville, WI
Florence Rooney ... Riverside, IL
Dennis E. & Rosemary Macko Wisnosky ...
Naperville, IL



CELEBRATING THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY YEAR OF FRIENDS OF BOHEMIAN NATIONAL CEMETERY, 2004-2014

The Roots of Friends of BNC

by Evelyn Krenek Fergle

As we look forward to the 10th anniversary of the founding of Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery, it is interesting to reflect on the people and events that made it happen. In 2002, at the request of the late Robert Baumruk, then the president of Bohemian National Cemetery Association, Albert Walavich, a colleague of the late Helen Sclair, the noted "Cemetery Lady" and an avid cemetery tour volunteer, was asked to submit a proposal to the BNC Board of Directors on ways the board could increase public awareness of the cemetery. The board, at that time, was making plans for the 125th anniversary banquet celebration of the cemetery's founding.

In his proposal of 20 ideas, number 18 stated: "Start a Friends of BNC group with one of its goals to raise funds for dramatic projects such as the restoration of the bronzes in the cemetery. The organization would then be another visibility factor to making people aware of Bohemian National and its historical /artistic/ architectural importance." According to Albert, at that time only one other cemetery in the United States had such a group.

A year later, in his 2003 Memorial Day address at the cemetery, local attorney Joseph Vosicky, of the Bohemian Lawyers Association, reiterated Albert Walavich's suggestion. A week later at the June meeting of the BNCA board, an enthusiastic discussion took place, generated by Mr. Vosicky's stirring

speech just days before, on how the Board could capitalize on this second attempt to help the cemetery. At the time, I was a delegate to the Board representing CSAGSI (Czech and Slovak American Genealogy Society of Illinois). I remember saying to the group, "Why then don't we start a Friends group?" From the back of the room, another voice said, "And I think Evelyn Fergle should start it!" Since I had made the suggestion, I felt I needed to follow through, though my home was 300 miles away in Michigan. My involvement with the BNCA and CSAGSI brought me to Chicago at least eight times a year. I stated that with the support of the other delegates I would be willing to help organize a group over the next few months, and with the support of the BNCA board, I would be willing to serve as the temporary chairperson to help in the organization. A motion was made and passed that we start such a group. The rest, as they say, is history.

Over the next few months, several organizational meetings were held. Nineteen volunteer delegates and officers came together monthly. With the encouragement and advice of Helen Sclair, Albert Walavich, and the late Dr. Joseph Ceithaml, a BNCA trustee, the organization took the steps to develop a constitution and mission and vision statements. Delegate Linda Hudecek volunteered as secretary during this initial planning period.

By the spring of 2004, we had our first volunteer slate of officers: co-

chairs Marge Sladek Stueckemann and Mary Ellen Panoch-Zuro; treasurer Bill Hosna; secretary Juli Nelson; and I agreed to be a member-at-large. In our first year of existence, we generated over \$5000 from an initial mailing to 1500 people in the Chicago area. Through the efforts of Ivo Broskevic, then the Cultural Secretary at the Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, D.C., we received our first grant of \$5000 in October of 2004 to help in our establishment as an official organization.

A more detailed list of the many accomplishments and activities sponsored by Friends of BNC will be published in a subsequent issue of this newsletter. We have added additional officers and positions to our Friends board, which is still under the capable leadership of Marge Sladek Stueckemann, who was first elected president on May 7, 2005.

One of the highlights of our organization is our popular tours, led by the very knowledgeable Albert Walavich. He continues to amass fascinating information and stories about the people buried at the cemetery. When Albert proudly refers to himself as the "Godfather" of our group, we heartily agree, as he planted the seed of the idea back in 2002. We have flourished to become a group with over 300 members and have achieved both national and international recognition of the Bohemian National Cemetery of Chicago.

Stories of the Stones

by carol jean smetana

Do you know the name Matej Karásek? He served as the first president of the Bohemian National Cemetery Association in 1877-8, overseeing operations during the crucial first year of the cemetery's existence. So why isn't he buried at BNC?



Matej Karásek circa 1877
from Dějiny Česko - Národního
Hřbitova by Frank B. Zdrůbek

Matej Karásek immigrated to the United States in 1866, a 27-year-old farmer from Bohemia. By 1870 he was a successful retail grocer in Chicago, living on Canal Street in the early Bohemian neighborhood called Praha, married to Annie Svoboda, and having a personal estate valued at \$1000.

Matej represented the Bohemian Workingmen's Benevolent Society (Česko-Dělnický Podpůrný Sbor) at the meeting called to organize Bohemian National Cemetery on February 12, 1877. Two months later, on April 11, 1877, the Bohemian National Cemetery Association was incorporated by the State of Illinois, and Karásek was elected its first president, a position he held for one year. He offered to buy, for \$2000, ten acres from the cemetery's 50-acre plot and made an immediate cash down-payment of

\$1000. That thousand dollars, combined with donations from individuals and loans from the founding societies, enabled BNCA to make its first installment payment of \$2000 on the purchase of the 50-acre property. Karásek's ten acres was low-lying land along the river and southern boundary of the cemetery. Although it was unsuitable for burials, the land made a perfect location for convivial gatherings. The books on BNCA's history provide various accounts of cemetery activities culminating in "Karásek's Gardens." One such story involves the cemetery's second annual fundraising picnic, held on July 21, 1878, to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone for the cemetery's vault. After the ceremony, the crowd repaired to Karásek's Gardens for a celebration that lasted into the night, but raised less than expected—only \$571.12—because they ran out of beer, which, as you might imagine, depressed the celebratory mood of the Bohemians!

The 1880 federal census shows Matej and Annie living on their property adjacent to the cemetery with their six children, ages one to six—a birth every year! Five years later, in 1885, Matej sold his property to Vaclav Scheiner and headed west with his family - no, not west to the neighborhoods of Pilsen or Česká Kalifornie, but west across the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains to Tacoma, Washington Territory. He and Annie had seven children at the time; the youngest, Rosie, was not even a year old!

In the fall of 1890 the Karásek family was in the headlines of the *Tacoma Daily News*. Young Matthew, Jr., 16, was charged with the murder of a neighbor boy, Tommy Moore, while the two were out hunting with

Matej's rifle. Matthew, who had fled to Chicago, returned to Tacoma to stand trial. He testified that he had "sneaked" his father's gun so the two boys could go hunting. After walking awhile, Matthew laid the gun on a log, and the boys lay down to rest. Matthew got up and started to collect hazelnuts when he heard an explosion and turned to find Tommy fatally shot. Matthew grabbed the gun and ran away. The prosecution's evidence was all circumstantial, and it only took the jury half an hour to return with a verdict of not guilty. (Matthew would go on to study at Stanford University and eventually moved back to the Midwest where he pursued a career as a physician.)

Two years later, on August 24, 1892, Matej Karásek died at the age of 56 from heart disease, leaving a widow and nine children. He was buried two days later in Tacoma Cemetery.



The Karásek family plot at Tacoma Cemetery, Tacoma, Washington.

Photo from Findagrave.com

In 1908, another tragedy befell the Karásek family. Matej and Annie's youngest son, 29-year-old James Karásek, was killed when he was mistaken for a deer while hunting

with a group of men. Less than an hour previously, James had good-naturedly chastised his fellow hunter John Gabriel for not

shooting at a deer James had flushed out of the woods for him; the companion explained that by the time he was sure it was a deer, the animal had fled out of range. Unfortunately, the next time there was movement in the woods, Mr. Gabriel didn't take the time to make sure.

eventually tried for assault of Dora's mother and deported.

Anna Soukup Karásek died December 25, 1922, at the age of 76. Matej and Anna, and their children Fanny, James, Josephine, Frank, and Frank's wife Jessie are all buried together in Tacoma Cemetery, Tacoma, Washington.

HUNTER FALLS TO GUN OF FRIEND

John E. Gabriel Kills J. W. Karásek in Woods on Whidby Island, Mistaking Him for Deer.

Let Game Pass Him on Runway First Because He Was Not Sure—Shoots Man Half Hour Later.

J. W. Karásek, assistant engineer at the Seattle public library, was shot and killed by John E. Gabriel while hunting on Whidby Island Saturday. Karásek was mistaken for a deer by his companion. The body of the dead man was brought to Seattle yesterday and is being held at the morgue of the Seattle Undertaking Company.

There were about ten men in the hunting party and Karásek was starting the deer. He put one up half a mile from the runway where Gabriel was stationed. The deer passed his stand, but Gabriel failed to shoot. Shortly after this Karásek made his appearance and asked Gabriel why he did not fire. The hunter said he was not sure it was a deer until it was too late. About half an hour later Karásek again started to break through the woods near where Gabriel was stationed and the latter opened fire, shooting Karásek through the head and killing him almost instant-

In January 1909, the Karásek family was in the headlines again. This time it was 24-year-old daughter Rosie. In March 1908, Matej's widow Annie had sent Rosie, a music teacher and accomplished pianist, to Europe to study music, along with her friend Dora. But Rosie and Dora fell under the spell of a cult leader named Joshua Klein. Dora's mother claimed the girls had been spirited away to his home in the Swiss Alps where they were being held virtual captives. "What Mysterious Power Does this Man Hold over Women?" the headline asked. After Dora's mother's unsuccessful attempt to bring her daughter home, Rose's older brother Frank traveled to Europe in January 1909 and brought Rosie back home. Joshua Klein was



Pet Cremation at Bohemian National Cemetery

Bohemian National Cemetery is now offering cremation services for pets.



Pet Size	Price
Up to 25 lbs.	\$165.00
26 lbs. to 60 lbs.	190.00
61 lbs. to 100 lbs.	210.00
Larger than 100 lbs.	300.00 +
Smaller animals are \$25 – \$50	



Contact the cemetery for more information: 773-539-8442

What's New with Friends of BNC



(continued from first page)
the fall of Communism, his beautiful gravestone, complete with a picture of the Tatra mountains, still stands proudly at our cemetery.

We are continuing to pursue the best course for overall restoration projects of the crematorium, including the dome, walls, and cement steps. We are working closely with **Anne Sullivan**, professor of Historic Restoration at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and we hope to have a team of experts come to BNC in the

spring to help plan the best way to proceed.

Extended family members - is that how you think of your beloved dog, cat, or possibly bird or turtle? That is how the new pet crematorium is listing the clients at this recently finished addition to BNC services. If you go into the office, be sure to check out the new pet cremation urns, which include a fireplug, small urns with either cat or dog prints on them, and a model of a reclining cat. More information on this is available elsewhere in this issue!

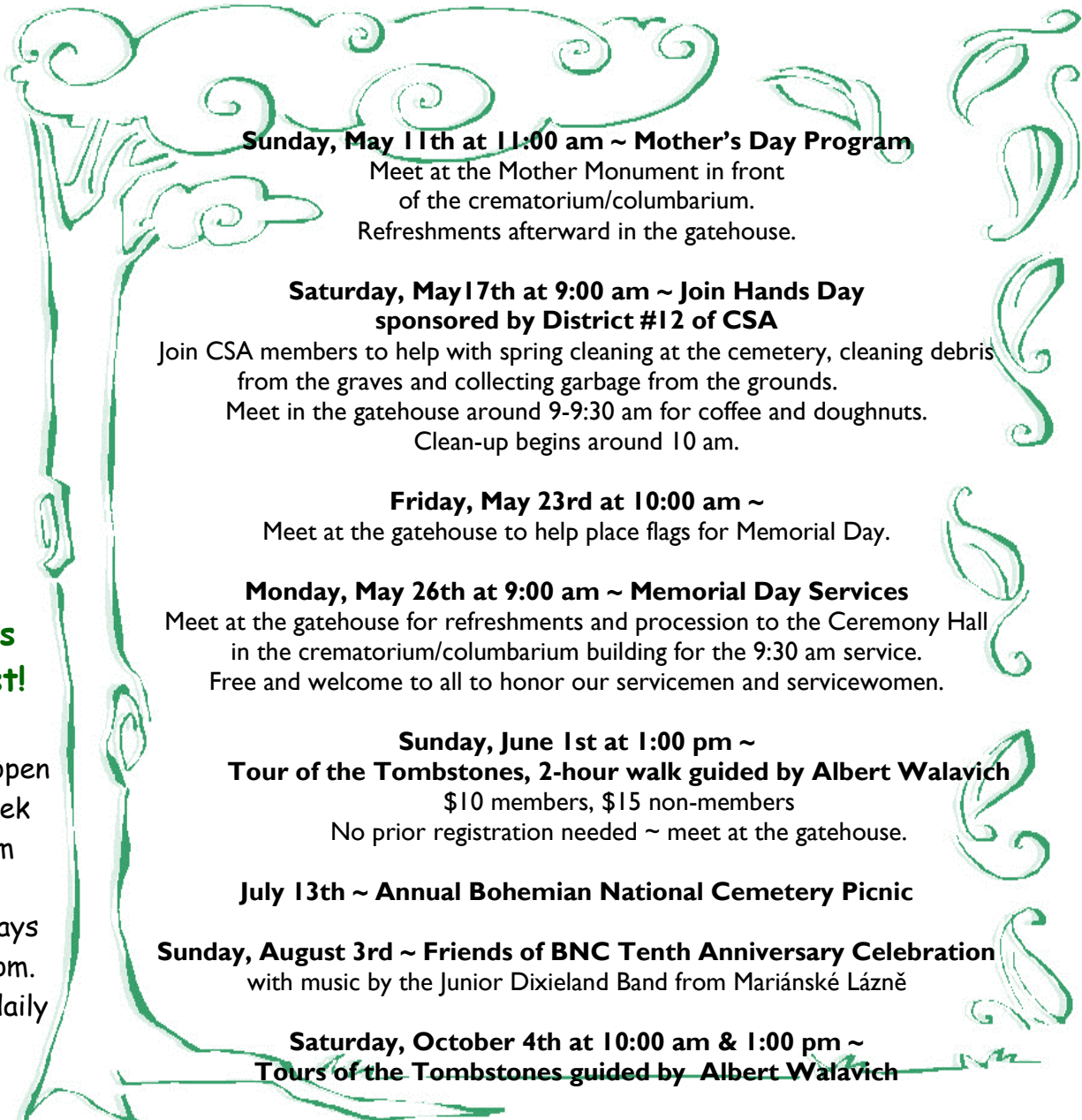
Be sure to save the date for our 10th anniversary gala! Spirits and chlebičky, plus other appetizers, special remembrances of our start in 2004, and most important, a chance to hear the **Junior Dixieland Band** from Mariánské Lázně! These young musicians are terrific, as we learned when they played at the BNC picnic in 2008. No cost - just come and celebrate our successes! Bring friends, too!

Marge Sladek Stueckemann
President

Upcoming Events at Bohemian National Cemetery

Summer hours begin May 1st!

Office will be open during the week from 7:30 am to 3 pm and on Saturdays from 9 am to 1 pm. Grounds open daily until 4 pm.



Sunday, May 11th at 11:00 am ~ Mother's Day Program

Meet at the Mother Monument in front of the crematorium/columbarium. Refreshments afterward in the gatehouse.

Saturday, May 17th at 9:00 am ~ Join Hands Day sponsored by District #12 of CSA

Join CSA members to help with spring cleaning at the cemetery, cleaning debris from the graves and collecting garbage from the grounds. Meet in the gatehouse around 9-9:30 am for coffee and doughnuts. Clean-up begins around 10 am.

Friday, May 23rd at 10:00 am ~

Meet at the gatehouse to help place flags for Memorial Day.

Monday, May 26th at 9:00 am ~ Memorial Day Services

Meet at the gatehouse for refreshments and procession to the Ceremony Hall in the crematorium/columbarium building for the 9:30 am service. Free and welcome to all to honor our servicemen and servicewomen.

Sunday, June 1st at 1:00 pm ~

Tour of the Tombstones, 2-hour walk guided by Albert Walavich

\$10 members, \$15 non-members
No prior registration needed ~ meet at the gatehouse.

July 13th ~ Annual Bohemian National Cemetery Picnic

Sunday, August 3rd ~ Friends of BNC Tenth Anniversary Celebration

with music by the Junior Dixieland Band from Mariánské Lázně

Saturday, October 4th at 10:00 am & 1:00 pm ~

Tours of the Tombstones guided by Albert Walavich



Live from BNC

(continued from first page)

of the room was completed. The next area that will be scraped and painted will be the elevator room.

This winter has been extremely cold and very snowy. Cemetery personnel have been constantly plowing and shoveling. Due to the harsh weather conditions, burial services have been held in the Ceremony Hall, instead of at the gravesites. Because the ground is frozen two to three feet in depth, ground heaters have to be used to thaw the ground so that graves can be dug. Our cemetery employees are to be complimented for the handling of the burials with such cold weather and frozen ground.

They also deserve praise for keeping the roads clean and open so that services can be attended and graves can be visited.

The restoration of the vestibule in the crematorium/columbarium

continues. Because of the extremely cold weather and snow, **Tony Kartsonas** has to be careful when using the solutions needed for restoring the doors, since they can only be used in certain temperatures. He also has been deterred from working on the vestibule area because of the increase in use of the Ceremony Hall for services that would normally be held at graveside. However, the outer doors are done, and he is now working on the inner doors. Tony Kartsonas and Chuck Michalek lifted a section of the rug in the vestibule area and found a terrazzo floor underneath. Tony will determine what is needed to restore the floor.

The old morgue is being remodeled in order to comply with the Illinois Cemetery Act. In order to comply with mandated requirements regarding storage of bodies for cremations, the cemetery had to purchase a walk-in cooler for the

bodies. In addition, a new entranceway into the morgue needs to be constructed, along with the installation of new lighting, a sink and an eyewash station.

Something always seems to need updating around the cemetery, but by taking the repairs one step at a time, your cemetery is being renovated. That is why everyone should make it a point to visit our wonderful cemetery and see for themselves all the improvements that are being made.

Please try to attend our Memorial Day Services on Monday, May 26th at 9:30 am (if you'd like, join us in the gatehouse at 9 am for refreshments and the procession to the Ceremony Hall), and also save the date for the Bohemian National Cemetery annual picnic on July 13th.

Andy Bultas
Vice-President

Donations received January and February 2014

Sponsors (\$100—\$499)

Katherine Babcock
Paul Blecha
Cicero Rebekah Lodge
#44 IOOF
Duke Dellin
Carl & Mary Ellen Flaks
Joseph Hasman
Lillian Huelsman
Randall Kadlec
Paul Kasik

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Stroner families
Marilyn Hughes
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Joseph Topinka
Marjorie Turek
Lorraine Velek
Frank Zedeck

Thank you all for your generosity.
Your donations help preserve and restore Bohemian National Cemetery.

Friends of Bohemian National Cemetery

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Heritage Happenings

we're on the web
www.friendsofbnc.org



It's Planting Time: Spring Volunteer Opportunities at BNC

BNC will host a floral design contest again this year, and Friends wants to participate. But we need volunteers to plant and weed our small plot in front of the Cermak Mausoleum. We have a design idea, and the flowers will be provided. Planting will probably be at the end of May, and after that, we'll need volunteers to weed regularly. (The cemetery will take care of watering.) Do you have a friend or two with whom you'd like to get



together a few times this summer? Why not enjoy each other's company while you help Friends beautify the cemetery? You don't have to be a master gardener, just be willing to dig in the dirt a little and pull some weeds! If you're interested in heading up this project, or just want to come once or twice to plant or weed, please email Carol Smetana at editor@friendsofbnc.org, or call Andy Bultas at 630-654-2051 (leave a message).

If you've attended Memorial Day services at the cemetery, you've seen the grounds decked out with flags in honor of all who have served in our military. Friends of BNC places those flags every year, and we would love to have you help us. We'll be decorating the cemetery on Friday, May 23, at 10 am. See the listing in "Upcoming Events" on page six for further details.

