



Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust CEO Jonathan Tribe and Springvale Botanical Cemetery chief operating officer Jane Grover present the plaque to Health Minister David Davis. 112931 Picture: ROB CAREW

Cemetery tops list

By CASEY NEILL

SPRINGVALE Botanical Cemetery has been named the best in the world for 2013.

The 422-acre Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (SMCT) site was the first cemetery outside the USA to win the American Cemetery Excellence Award.

Health Minister David Davis visited the 113-year-old site last Wednesday to acknowledge the achievement.

"As you look around these beautiful grounds it is easy to see why this cemetery is so highly regarded," he said.

Independent trade publication American Cemetery Magazine awarded the honour for Springvale's community engagement, innovation, performance, team spirit and ground maintenance.

Judges said the site had come a long way from a once-isolated and impoverished rural cemetery, served by a poorly-patronised mortuary train.

There have been about 139,000 burials and 390,000 cremations at the cemetery since 1901.

Today it's home to more than 80,000 established trees, sweeping lawns, landscaped gardens and cascading water features.

"We received dozens of entries from cemeteries throughout the world - all of them doing great things to serve their communities," Kates-Boylston Publications executive director Thomas A Parmalee said.

"But Springvale stood out in so many ways, and it truly exemplifies that cemeteries can continue to be relevant and beautiful."

Springvale Botanical Cemetery chief operating officer Jane Grover said it was home to the largest feng shui designed Asian cemetery, the Song He Yuan, and other special areas dedicated to the military and police force.

"We also have a children's lawn complete with playground, so siblings visiting can be entertained

while parents have time for quiet reflection," she said.

Horticulture team leader John Wright has maintained the cemetery grounds for 13 years.

"The horticultural team has got quite a passion for the grounds," he said.

"It's the people you meet on a daily basis, from the public that have lost loved ones.

"You have a rapport. You might only spend five or 10 minutes with them but it makes their day.

"It makes your day as well."

Client services consultant Samantha Dickason said the cemetery was unique.

"We encourage people to not come out and not only come to remember their families but enjoy the grounds," she said.

"We have people that walk their dogs through, we have people that come to the café just to have a coffee.

"People even have their wedding photos taken here, because it

doesn't look like a cemetery.

"It's the most beautiful cemetery in Melbourne."

Ms Dickason said the award recognised the cemetery's whole team.

"From horticultural to the grave diggers to the client services consultants, right through to senior management, to the café - it takes all of us working together to build," she said.

"The most rewarding part of my role is to be able to look after these families at possibly the worst time in their life, and guide them and give them what they need."

Roxy Flores has managed the cemetery's café for the past year.

"This cemetery is absolutely amazing. Wherever you go it just is delightful," she said.

"You can help people and you can give a little bit of love to the community."