

Cemetery welcomes community

GRAVEYARD GETS BIG REVAMP

Melissa Townsend and John Masanauskas

CEMETERY developers are hoping a \$50 million redevelopment of Bunurong Memorial Park will turn it into a drawcard for picnicking families and sightseers.

The 101ha Dandenong South site is being transformed by southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust into a landscaped community park almost three times the size of the Royal Botanic Gardens. It will include a lakeside chapel, waterways, cafe, sculptures and a children's playground.

SMCT CEO Jonathan Tribe said Trust research found that in the 1860s, around 5,000 people would visit the Melbourne General Cemetery on a summer Sunday, picnicking in the gardens and walking through the grounds.

Mr Tribe said they hoped the redeveloped Bunurong would become just as popular as a community meeting place.

"We want to demystify cemeteries and get people to regard them as great community assets — green, relaxing places where you can socialise with family and friends," Mr Tribe said.

"That's how people in the Victorian era regarded cemeteries.

"In the twentieth century, people developed a morbid attitude towards cemeteries.

"Bunurong Memorial Park is a community space that will help change that perception."

The redevelopment sees Greater Dandenong shaping up as Victoria's cemetery capital.

The city is already home to Melbourne's largest cemetery, Springvale Botanical Cemetery, which has 20 years' of space left.

Mr Tribe said he expected Bunurong would meet Melbourne's population needs for at least 70 years.

BURYING THE PAST

Cemetery features:

- More than 80,000 native trees and shrubs planted
- First stage to be completed in 2016
- Landscaping and design to have Australian theme
- First stage to include multi-faith meditation rooms
- 125 construction jobs over 18-month period
- Crematorium, mausoleum and Greek Orthodox Church to be retained
- Existing interments will not be impacted
- Buildings will be carbon neutral
- Recycled water will save 500,000 litres a year
- Stage 5 to be completed in 2050

Grave prices:

- Garden edge cremation memorial \$1875
- Islamic lawn grave \$3850
- Headstone lawn grave \$4120
- Monumental grave package \$5260
- Ornamental graves from \$9380
- Feng Shui grave packages \$10,090 to \$23,683
- Pieta Mausoleum Dual Crypt Package \$25,845

"It's going to be a very innovative, state-of-the-art cemetery and it's going to be particularly geared to all of the different ethnic communities that make up the population down here, so it will have a high degree of cultural relevance," he said.

Meanwhile, the Trust has introduced Sunday afternoon jazz sessions at Springvale Botanical cemetery in a further bid to demystify the burial process.

Southern Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust cultural heritage manager Dr Celestina Sagazio said cemeteries should be about the living as much as the departed.

"There should be a reason for the public to feel comfortable about coming to a cafe at Springvale and enjoying music," Dr Sagazio said.