

May 2023

The Evergreens Cemetery Quarterly Newsletter



Chinese Heritage at The Evergreens Cemetery for Asian American and Pacific Heritage Month



Photo of Dr. Joseph C. Toms



Grave of Dr. Joseph C. Toms - Mt. of Olives #589

Join the Urban Park Rangers on May 21 for a free walking tour of the Evergreens Cemetery in honor of Asian American and Pacific Heritage Month. The tour highlights the connections between the cemetery and New York's Asian

American population and explores the lives and activism of important Asian American figures buried at The Evergreens.

The Evergreens provides an inclusive and welcoming resting place for generations of people of Chinese heritage, with a commitment to the Chinese community which has been unwavering from the earliest burials in the 19th century to today. The Evergreens was the first cemetery in New York City to bury Chinese people, and many people of Chinese heritage continue to be buried here. Many identifiable ethnic sections are scattered throughout the cemetery's 225 acres.

The tour will include a stop at the Seaman's Grounds, which contains several notable burials. These include John Shu, a sailor buried in 1853 who was the first Chinese person to be interred in New York City. The Seaman's Grounds also contains the grave of war hero Ou Loo, a seaman in the U.S. Navy during World War I. Many other prominent burials are included on the tour.

According to Urban Park Ranger Sarah Melo, who will lead the tour, "we are connected to the past through individuals, the places and groups they belong to. The Evergreens Cemetery is a unique place with hundreds of years of history kept in its gates. To commemorate Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage month, we wanted to bring the spotlight on an active cemetery with longstanding connections to the Chinese American community in New York City. With the help of the amazing staff of Evergreens, we are excited to have a chance to explore this very special place."

See the Upcoming Events section of the newsletter or <https://www.nycgovparks.org/events/2023/05/21/asian-pacific-american-heritage-month-evergreen-cemetery> for details about the event.

Black Birders Week: Birding with New York Restoration Project and The Evergreens Cemetery

On May 30 the Evergreens will welcome visitors for *Black Birders Week: Birding with New York Restoration Project and Evergreens Cemetery*. This free event is part of the 4th annual Black Birders Week. The bird walk begins at Aberdeen Community Garden, which is adjacent to the Evergreens, before continuing at the cemetery. Sam Philbert from NYC Audubon will lead the event.



The Evergreens is popular among birders for its tranquil grounds and wide variety of trees, home to many bird species. The walk will include information about the trees of the Evergreens, which is an accredited arboretum. Attendees will also learn about the history of the cemetery and its notable burials, including prominent Black figures.

Black Birders Week is a series of events that began in 2020 to highlight and engage with Black nature enthusiasts and raise visibility for Black birders, who face unique challenges and dangers during outdoor activities. It is organized by The BlackAFInSTEM Collective, which consists of STEM professionals and students.

According to Roslyn Rivas, Public Programs Manager at event partner NYC Audubon, "the week started as a way to highlight and celebrate Black birders, scientists, and nature enthusiasts and create a safe space where we could share our love for the outdoors, a place we should be able to enjoy without fear."

Julie Bose, The Evergreens Cemetery President, states "we are delighted to take

part in Black Birders Week. Inclusion and diversity are among our core values, and we are committed to connecting with the community and ensuring our beautiful green space is open to all."

See the Upcoming Events section of the newsletter for details about the event. For more information about Black Birders Week see www.blackafinstem.com or follow @BlackAFInSTEM on social media.

Notable Resident

This article continues our series highlighting important people buried at The Evergreens Cemetery

Keith Lamar Johnson (1972 - 2022)

Keith "Wonderboy" Johnson was an American singer-songwriter who is considered one of gospel quartet music's greatest vocalists. He was born in Brooklyn, NY and when he was five his family started calling him "Wonderboy" due to his innate wondrous vocal talent. As a teen he went to Harlem's Apollo Theater to see great gospel acts, and sang with the the Boys Choir of Harlem and with his father's quartet group, The Spiritual Voices.



His solo music career began in 1998 when he released *Through the Storm* with World Wide Gospel Records. Over the course of 13 years he released 14 albums, with World Wide Gospel Records, Worldwide Records, *Verity Records*, Central South Records, and Blacksmoke Records. 11 albums landed on the *Billboard magazine Gospel Albums* chart, and others on the *Independent Albums* and *Heatseekers Albums* charts. He won six Stellar Awards and was nominated for two Dove Awards. His backing vocalist and band are called The Spiritual Voices.

During his career Johnson won legions of fans, finding acclaim with hits such as "Let Go and Let God," "I'll Fly Away" "Be Right," "I've Got a Feeling," and "Hide Behind the Mountain." His "12 Days of Christmas" became a holiday favorite on gospel radio stations. Johnson's final album, released in 2022 by Blacksmoke Records, was *Restructure, Renew & Reunion*.

He passed away in September 2022 at his home in Atlanta, Georgia and is survived by his parents, Susan and Phillip Johnson; a sister, Sonya Denise Johnson; and his daughters, Brianna Johnson and Elyse Johnson.

Staff Spotlight

Interview with Shevonne N. Zaccheo, Family Service Counselor

How long have you worked at the Evergreens?

My official start date was November 1, 2021.

What does your job consist of?

My title is Family Service Counselor and what that entails is me helping families find their final resting place, whether it is for immediate or for future use.



What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The most rewarding aspect is to guide the families and educate them. Because not everybody talks about death, it is not the most positive topic to speak on. So, just leading the families the right way and letting them know they are making the right decision. A lot of times when we are done people say it was not as bad as they thought it would be, that I made it very seamless for them. To me that is very

rewarding because that is what I am here for, to guide and make it easier on the families.

Where did you work before you came to the Evergreens?

I have been a licensed Funeral Director since 2012.

Where do you live?

I live in Brooklyn, in Gerritsen Beach to be exact.

What do you like to do in your free time?

My husband and I have our own business coaching individuals and helping them with finances, helping them with their credit, helping them build some type of passive income – because it is always good to diversify your portfolio, so you do not have all your eggs in one basket as far as income. That is what I love to do outside of this, and also spending time with family. To me that is so important because being in this industry, it is a realization we are not guaranteed life every day, so I am huge on spending quality time with loved ones.

John Bowne High School visits The Evergreens Cemetery



Certified Arborist, New York Botanical Garden instructor, and renowned author Bill Logan taught a Tree ID Class to sophomores, juniors, and seniors from the John Bowne High School when they visited The Evergreens Cemetery on May 9th. The students are enrolled in the Agriculture Tract at the John Bowne High School which has been partnering with the Evergreens Foundation since the NYS DEC and US Forestry 2019 ReLeaf Conference. With excellent faculty support, many students continue on to college studies in natural sciences and arbor care and this class was an opportunity to engage on site outside the classroom.

The students began the day with a walking tour through the A. J. Downing landscaped historic grounds, viewing some of the majestic trees that make up the more than 3,500 tree canopy at the Evergreens. Along the way, they had the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of tree identification of the more than 120 tree species the cemetery has to offer. The students' day concluded with a picnic lunch in the historic Summer House, overlooking the lush greenspace across from the historic A.J. Davis chapel. The cemetery was honored to provide a unique and robust STEM hands-on learning experience for these students against the backdrop of our forested grounds and is grateful for the support of NYS DEC Urban and Community Forest funding that make these programs possible. Teaching youth the multiple benefits of urban and community forests in collaboration with a long-term educational partner is a public service the Evergreens is committed to providing. We look forward to welcoming the students back for a fall foliage ID Class.

Wedding at The Evergreens Cemetery

The Evergreens Cemetery was delighted to make history, hosting our first ever wedding ceremony on Saturday May 13th. The bride and groom wanted to be close to both their family and friends who were able to attend the ceremony, as well as their loved ones who were laid to rest at the cemetery. They hosted their wedding ceremony in the green space behind the office – a first in the cemetery's 174-year history. Beautiful weekend weather and a lush green backdrop of trees and flowers made this special event memorable for all.



Upcoming Events

Asian American and Pacific Heritage Month - Chinese Heritage at The Evergreens Cemetery

Sunday, May 21, 2023
1:00 PM to 3:00 PM

Join the Urban Park Rangers in a guided tour of the Evergreens Cemetery in honor of Asian American and Pacific Heritage Month. Walk among beautiful landscaped, architecture and explore the connections between the cemetery and New York's Asian American population. Learn about the lives and activism of important Asian American figures buried in the cemetery.

Meet at the Evergreens Cemetery Brooklyn entrance -
Bushwick Avenue and Conway Street



Black Birders Week 2023

Tuesday, May 30, 2023
7:00 AM to 8:30 AM

Join NYC Audubon, New York Restoration Project, and The Evergreens Cemetery Preservation Foundation for a birdy and historical stroll on day three of Black Birders Week.

The group will meet at the adjacent Aberdeen Community Garden (98 Aberdeen St, Brooklyn, NY 11207) and traverse through it and into the cemetery.

Stargazing with the Amateur

Astronomers Association of New York

**Friday, June 23, 2023
8:00 PM to 10:30 PM**

Come observe and learn about the stars with members of the Amateur Astronomers Association of New York. This stargazing event offers the rare opportunity for attendees to observe the night sky in an area relatively free of glare from the lights of the city. Members bring high-powered telescopes and binoculars through which everyone is invited to look, and will provide instruction on how to find objects in the night sky.

For more information please check our website.



Making Arrangements

The Evergreens Cemetery provides a beautiful final resting place for loved ones, and we are pleased to discuss the variety of options available.

Contact:

Shevonne N. Zaccheo
Family Service Counselor
718-455-5300

sz@theevergreenscemetery.org

Cemetery Hours

Grounds/Gates open 7 days a week:
8:00 AM to 4:30 PM

*Please visit our website or contact the office for
holiday closures.*

Office:

Monday through Friday:
8:00 AM to 4:30 PM

Saturday:
9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

The Evergreens Cemetery Board of Trustees

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