



CONTACTS:

Damaris Teixeira
DCYF Public Information Officer
damaris.teixeira@dcyf.ri.gov

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The Rhode Island Training School (RITS) Works to Restore Indigent Cemetery and Build Educational Curriculum for Youth

Cemetery clean-up effort aims to honor the memory of the many people buried on the site over the years, and to provide the youth in care an opportunity to engage in experiential learning.

[Providence, R.I.] (April 25, 2024) – On Saturday, April 27, 2024, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Rhode Island Training School (RITS) staff and volunteers will head outside to the State Farm Cemetery Annex grounds, located on the RITS property, to start the next phase of the Indigent Cemetery Project. The project, which aims to restore the cemetery to its original pristine condition, is a collaboration with T-Time Productions as an educational partner to the RITS and will provide students opportunities for experiential learning. The land on which the cemetery is located, has a long and rich history and this project provides an opportunity to honor the memory of those buried there, many of whom were people of color. This project aligns with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families' (DCYF) commitment to racial equity, by actively working to ensure that the stories and legacies of people of color are not forgotten.

One of the goals of the project is to create a digital curriculum to share with students which will include information about people buried in the cemetery and its history. Initial project work took place in November of 2023 when the team removed dead trees and branches, trash, and other waste from the property.

“This project underscores the importance of learning about our history and will provide our youth at the RITS, and throughout the State, with an opportunity to gain an understanding about a segment of the Rhode Island population who are buried in that cemetery,” says DCYF Director Ashley Deckert. “Additionally, this project has enhanced the educational curriculum at the RITS allowing students to learn outside the classroom.”

Heather Dos Santos, principal at the RITS, adds that this project fits in with the school's mission and vision for education. “I value diverse curriculum opportunities that allow us as educators and students to move beyond traditional textbooks to engage real-world current curricular connections in society to better understand history and the world as we know it. This was the impetus of my connection and engagement with T-Time Productions for both my staff and the greater learning community here at the RITS. This indigent cemetery project is reflective of the value that we place on these very significant exploratory learning opportunities.” Dos Santos adds that T-Time Productions is a paid partner to the RITS through Title II grant funds allocated to their educational program.

According to John Scott, senior community development training specialist at the RITS, the history of the cemeteries in this area of the state includes the State Farm Cemetery which was in use from 1875 through 1918 and now lies under the roadbed of Route 37. The remains of 71 individuals from that cemetery were moved to State Institution Cemetery #2, but when that cemetery reached capacity, the State Farm Cemetery Annex was added. The Annex was on the property of the old Rhode Island Training School, which is now directly behind the Youth Development Center.

“This project is about respect for those buried behind the Youth Development Center. We do this because we feel that those resting there are more than just a number,” says Scott adding that the curriculum at the RITS will dovetail into the history of the cemetery and include other activities.

Theresa Moore, president of T-Time Productions, agrees. “The project is an exploration of the indigent cemetery located on the RITS property. It is a unique opportunity to explore the histories, not only of the land/property, but also the people who are buried there. This project is an excellent educational curriculum opportunity as it allows the students to engage in experiential learning and, at the same time, view the cemetery’s history through the various lenses of ELA, math, science, social studies, and art and connect this history to current day topics and issues,” she says.

As a media company and educational publisher, Moore says T-Time is always looking for interesting stories that can also help facilitate student learning. “The indigent cemetery project is a perfect example of this. For the past few years, it has been great to partner with the students, teachers, and leadership at the RITS to identify unique learning experiences for the students during their time at the facility and we are excited to see what impactful, multi-discipline curricula the students will help develop as a part of this indigent cemetery project,” Moore says. Moore adds that students and teachers will also be able to access information T-Time has been able to source from the Rhode Island State Archives and other research entities, as well as aerial drone footage of the RITS and the cemetery grounds donated by Mike Vacca from Elevate Drone Media.

Saturday’s clean-up event will allow the team of staff and volunteers to continue with phase two of the Indigent Cemetery Project. As well as with an opportunity to unveil the State Cemetery sign now back in at home, as well as provide an update about the project’s progress.

Media are invited to attend this event, please respond to Damaris Teixeira by email at damaris.teixeira@dcyf.ri.gov. Note, reporters attending will need to check in at a booth to acknowledge confidentiality restrictions and requirements not allowing any youth present at the event to be photographed or videotaped.

About DCYF

The mission of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families is to partner with families and communities to raise safe and healthy children and youth in a caring environment and to engage respectfully and effectively with people of all races, ethnicities, cultures, classes, genders, sexual orientations, and faiths in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of all individuals, families, tribes, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each.

DCYF has three major operational divisions: Children’s Behavioral Health Services, Child Welfare (including child protective services, family services, and permanency support), and Juvenile Justice (including the Rhode Island Training School and juvenile probation). The Department supports more than 2,400 children and their families both in the community and in DCYF care, and indirectly serves thousands more through community-based programs.

About T-Time Productions

With a mission of shining light on and creating awareness for untold or little-known stories and histories, T-Time Productions is committed to the creation and production of unique programming and content for various media platforms including television, online, mobile and streaming. Combining creativity and flexibility with the knowledge of numerous facets of the business including programming, production, marketing and sales, T-Time Productions is focused on the combination of education and entertainment via great story telling.

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