

# Ask the Undertaker

By Ryan Helfenbein



## Going Green for All Eternity

Isn't it interesting how very simple words become more complex as we age? Take the word "green." As a child, green meant "Go!" It was a mixture of blue and yellow, the color of the Incredible Hulk and to some, thoughts of summer. Not any longer. This simple, one-syllable word now stands for so much more. Today, green could be defined by some as meaning "eco-friendly," "natural," "environmentally gracious" and even "a means of burial." In this issue of *Outlook by the Bay*, my question comes from a woman in Easton who asks, "Is green burial offered around here?"

This is a question that's becoming more popular due to the "green movement" we are all noticing in our society today. The AARP, ABC News and many media groups are covering this topic of "natural burial." This is a means of disposition that I feel could perhaps become more popular than cremation is today. To answer the question, yes, there is a "green" burial cemetery located in our state. It sits on the grounds of Bestgate Memorial Park, off of Bestgate Road in Annapolis. As far as I know, this green burial section offers the only available green burial lots in Maryland. Nonetheless, there is discussion of possibly some being available on the Eastern Shore in the coming years.

So what is this green burial all about, you might ask? Wikipedia defines it as "...a cemetery where the body is returned to the earth to decompose and recycle naturally. It is an environmentally sustainable alternative to existing funeral practices." Generally speaking, it is an area of natural surroundings offering a means of burial that is generally not harmful to the earth, which can include the burial of cremated remains in a biodegradable urn or burial in an environmentally friendly shroud or casket.

Most of us would think that this form of burial would date back to our cave men ancestors or even back to the Wild West era. You would be surprised to know that according to the Centre for Natural Burial, green burial began in 1993 in the United Kingdom. However, what is amazing is the fact that three years after the beginning of this movement, 17 "green burial cemeteries" became available and today more than 200 exist in the United Kingdom. This movement is becoming more and more popular and is now available right here in your backyard in Annapolis.

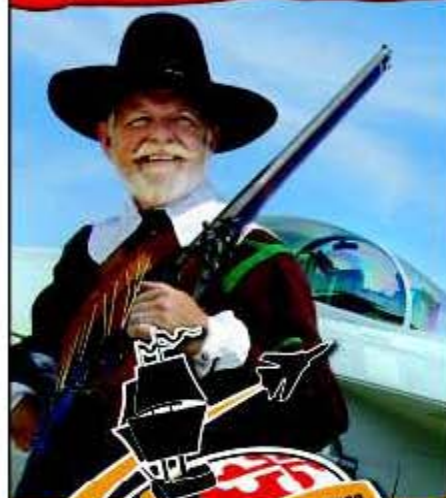
This local green burial cemetery offers a number of options to meet the means of "natural burial." One aspect that has a real "green touch" is that each grave is hand-dug and the markers used in this cemetery are trees-- not granite, bronze or marble, but trees. Another interesting aspect is that most green burial cemeteries today use a biodegradable casket for burial called an "ecopod" constructed of recyclable paper. In Maryland, they use an eco-friendly willow basket casket for green burials and for cremation, biodegradable urns.

You might ask that if there is no marker to show where the deceased was buried, how does the family know where to go after the services are over? Thanks to the incredible technology that is available to us today, each family member is given a GPS coordinate as to where their loved one is buried in the green cemetery. We use it in boats to locate fishing grounds, in cars to find our destinations and now even in cemeteries to locate our loved ones.

Ryan is a licensed funeral director and certified planning counselor. He can be reached at [ryan@fnFuneralHome.com](mailto:ryan@fnFuneralHome.com) or (410) 758-3987.



Maryland's adventure began here 375 years ago and continues today ...



1634 - 2009  
**MARYLAND CELEBRATE 375!**  
ST. MARY'S COUNTY

**IT'S OUR BIRTHDAY!**

Maryland began here 375 years ago— come celebrate with us!

Enjoy a year of heritage festivals, special deals, great getaways and cool giveaways. Don't miss our Big Birthday Bash, Friday through Sunday, June 19–21.

Try our Celebrate 375 Bruster's Real Ice Cream!

Visit the Web for details, and to find out how to get your FREE Discover St. Mary's County Value Card—our birthday gift to you!



DISCOVER **ST. MARY'S COUNTY**

[WWW.MARYLAND375.COM](http://WWW.MARYLAND375.COM)

St. Mary's County Division of Tourism  
800-327-9023  
[www.stmarysmd.com/tourism](http://www.stmarysmd.com/tourism)