

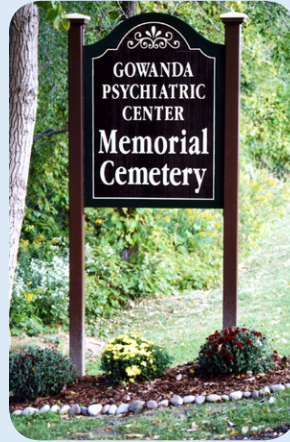
## Restoring a final resting place

A People Inc. project is helping to remember some forgotten lives. The endeavor is also an active example of the strides that have been made in the treatment of people with disabilities, and in acknowledging their history. In an isolated field near Route 62 in Collins, NY, the graves of 550 former patients of the Gowanda Psychiatric Center are typically marked by number, not by name. Unidentified and unmourned, the individuals interred there were patients from the 1950s to 1991.

Led by David Mack-Hardiman, People Inc. director of training, volunteer crews that include students from Siena College and St. Bonaventure University are restoring and documenting a section of the cemetery. Names have been identified, stones that have sunken into the earth have been raised, overgrowth has been cleared and rows of previously unnoticed gravesites have been discovered.

The Wheeler Road Cemetery is the final resting place of some 1,200 people who resided in what was known as Gowanda State Hospital and later the J. N. Adam Developmental Center, opened in 1898 to provide residential care for the "insane and idiotic".

Those who died while under care there were buried in adjacent fields. The majority of the graves do not include headstones or names; typically a marker of rusted metal or flat concrete, with or without a number and occasionally including a religious symbol, is the only commemoration of their existence.



"We've raised 434 markers, so far," said Mack-Hardiman. "It's a functionally abandoned cemetery, and we're there to identify everyone, clean everything off and bring the deceased some dignity. We're trying to find every stone."

Each grave can tell a story, and stories come slowly. A piece of rusty angle iron notes the final resting place of "469", for example, whose identity thus far is limited to "Anna", a Catholic, an immigrant and a widow who was admitted to the Center in 1899 and died about 20 years thereafter. These are the mysteries that await resolution in the Wheeler Road Cemetery.

A "Ceremony of Remembrance" was held on September 26, which included a tribute to those interred, and the unveiling of new signage and a monument for the cemetery.