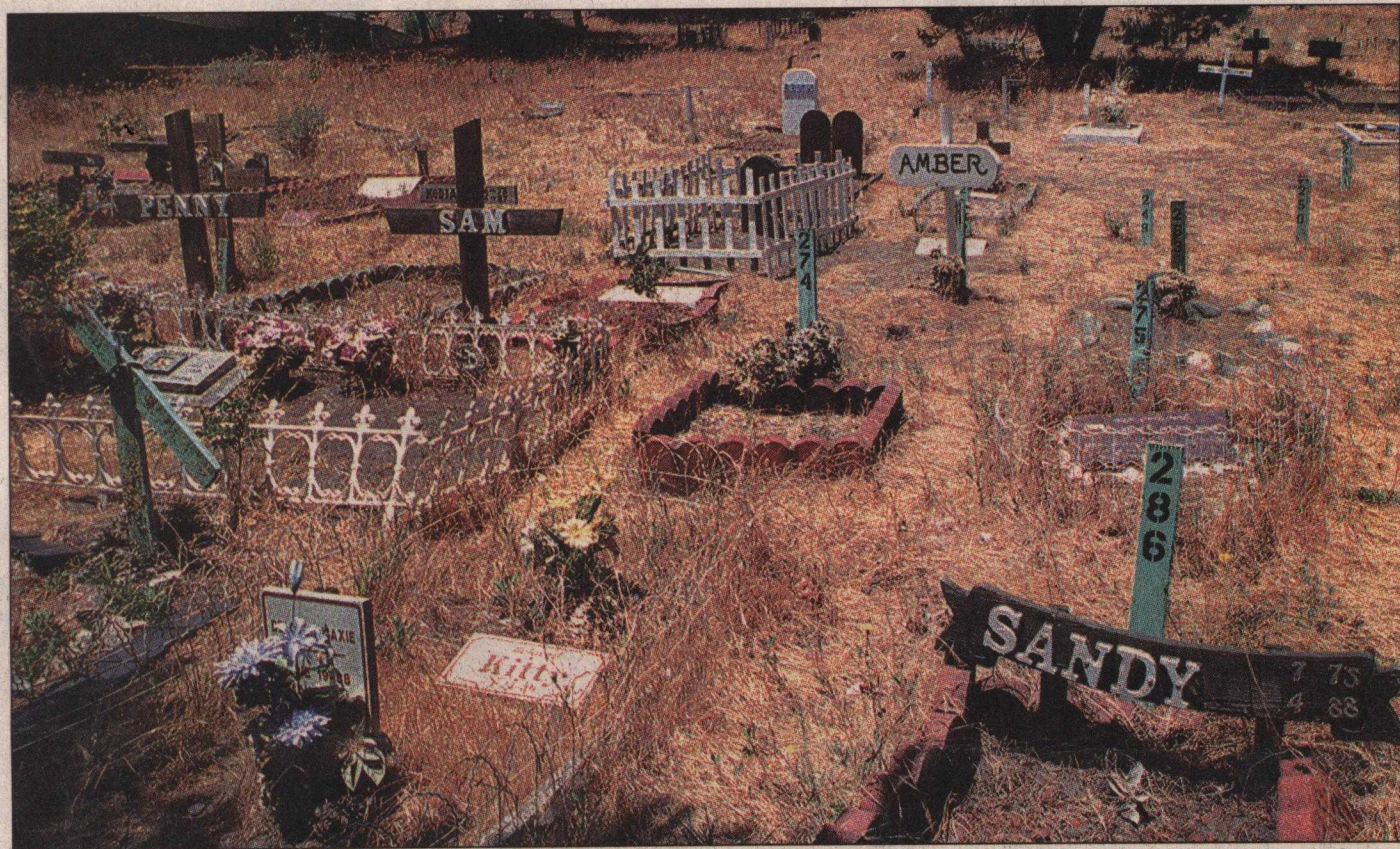


'This makes you cry. What's going to happen to poor Brick and My Pal Pookie?'

CAROLYN SWIFT, LOCAL HISTORIAN

Pet cemetery, R.I.P.

Developer buying SPCA site; graves to be unearthed



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

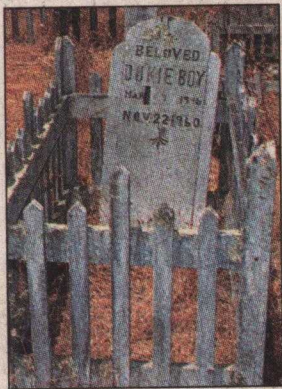
By **DAN WHITE**
Sentinel staff writer

SCOTTS VALLEY

The front gate of Pine Knoll pet cemetery has a small white sign saying: "Tread gently, passerby. Disturb not their gentle sleep."

But the Santa Cruz chapter of the SPCA, which owns the cemetery, plans to start digging up graves in two weeks, uprooting homemade tombstones, hand-carved Scotties and crosses.

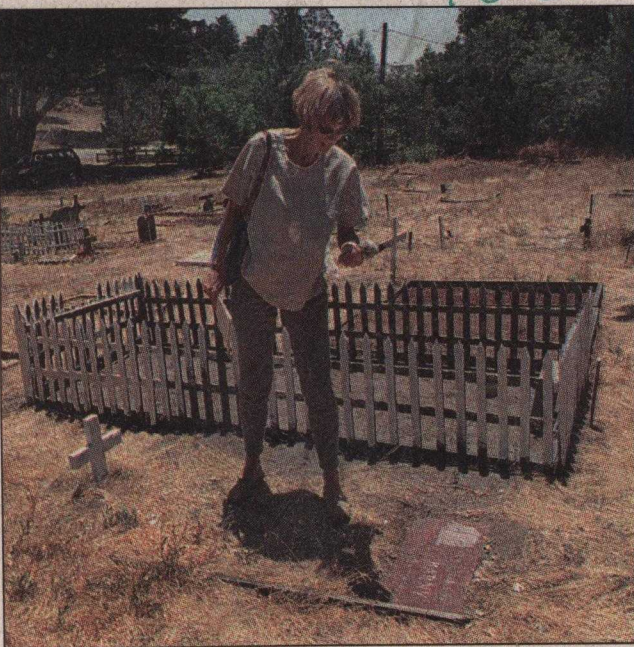
Goodbye "gentle sleep."



The SPCA says it has no choice but to close the sloping, 1.5-acre Sims Road cemetery off Highway 17, sell the land to a single-family home developer, then use the cash to pay off the SPCA's

estimated \$229,000 in debts to area governments. The SPCA did not disclose a sale price for the cemetery, which has been full since the early '90s.

Unclaimed remains will be sent to Monterey Bay Memorial Park, a pet cemetery near Prunedale. There they will be cremated and most likely placed in a common grave, the SPCA said. The grave



TOP: Graves at the SPCA-owned Pine Knoll pet cemetery will be dug up and eventually replaced by housing.

LEFT: Local historian Carolyn Swift picks up an old, weathered tennis ball near the headstone for a dog named Benny.

FAR LEFT: A headstone for Dukie Boy marks the spot where the beloved animal was buried.

may have a marker, possibly with pet names, according to Monterey Bay management.

People can claim their pets' remains, and the SPCA will unearth them free of charge.

The property is in escrow, spelling bad news for the tiny graves of Amber, Elvis, Lucky, Sue, Smidgeon, Digger P. Kieffer and Our Beloved Puppy Rojo. It means goodbye to Sarge, who has slept under a droopy pine since 1949. And don't forget Sandy, who "defended the weak, regardless of species."

The badly overgrown cemetery was founded in 1938. The 350 graves hold

mostly dogs and cats, though there are parrots and monkeys, too.

SPCA officials said several people have come forward to claim old graves after the agency ran an advertisement in the Sentinel, but acknowledged most will go unclaimed simply because of the age of the cemetery. Most graves date to the 1940s and '50s.

Many graves have little picket fences. Someone sculpted a bas-relief of a sad-eyed lapdog who stares toward Sims Road. The SPCA budgets \$2,000 a year for upkeep, but foxtails and dandelions blot out many graves.

Please see **CEMETERY** on **BACK PAGE**

Cemetery

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The fate of the unclaimed headstones is unknown. According to the SPCA, they could be displayed at the shelter the agency wants to build.

The SPCA's decision to sell the graveyard has outraged Ron Graves, whose grandfather, the late veterinarian Charles Edward Graves, gave the land to the SPCA. The elder Graves wanted the land to remain a pet cemetery.

"Supposedly the (SPCA) is interested in the protection of animals," said Graves, a former Capitola councilman who heard the news Monday. "Sounds like a money scheme."

Graves recalls working in the graveyard when he was 8, burying animals, watching his grandfather carve markers.

Graves said he plans to call a lawyer to find out if there is a deed restriction on the land. But SPCA spokeswoman Caitlyn Toropova said the agency's lawyers found none.

The SPCA doesn't want to sell the cemetery "(but) we have a debt, and we have to fund that debt," Toropova said. "We understand it is a very special place to many people. We wouldn't do it if there were any other options."

The sale is the latest turn for an

agency that has come under fire for the alleged misuse of \$750,000 in tax dollars, according to the county auditor. Area governments plan to buy the SPCA's Seventh Avenue facility and take control of the shelter, but the agency is still on the hook for more than \$200,000 in fees it owes local governments.

Area historian Carolyn Swift, a longtime admirer of the cemetery, called the SPCA's decision "really pathetic."

Swift visited Pine Knoll on Monday and stopped by a gravestone with a bull mastiff's face. Someone left a tennis ball there.

"This makes you cry," she said. "What's going to happen to poor Brick and My Pal Pookie?"

She considers the cemetery part of the county's eccentric but soulful past, along with "the tree circus," Santa's Village and a highway-side brontosaurus statue, all gone now.

But Jim Roberts, owner of the Prunedale pet cemetery, defended the SPCA.

He said Pine Knoll was a "weed patch, a blight on the neighborhood and a blight on pet cemeteries in general." He said he's heard horror stories of people sneaking in dead pets there because there's no protective fence.

"Cemeteries are supposed to be eternal," he said. "But people don't want to pay any money. The SPCA really doesn't have the budget to water lawns. The ones who com-



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Dozens of grave markers in the shape of Scottie dogs mark the final resting place of a pet buried at Pine Knoll cemetery.

plain loudest, the minute you ask them to pay \$40, \$50 a year for upkeep, they become apoplectic."

He said the remains are better off

under his care. "That cemetery is abandoned. It was already dead. We have plenty of room down here, and our grounds are coifed. We have

green grass and parking."

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