

# Cemetery caretakers see no ghosts, goblins

*Editor's note: A portion of this story was inadvertently omitted from this weekend's edition.*

**BY DON BOWEN**  
TRIBUNE STAFF

Anyone looking for ghosts and goblins at local cemeteries Wednesday night as part of their Halloween activities might be disappointed.

Caretakers of the two largest cemeteries in Fremont said they've had to deal with vandals on Halloween but never spirits from beyond.

"I've never heard a ghost story about this place," said Jim Clarke, who has been caring for Ridge Cemetery for more than 25 years. "I walk around the cemetery after dark."

Linden Avenue ends at the entrance of Ridge Cemetery on the west side of the city, and a walking trail currently ends there, too.

"I'll watch people all day walking down the trail, into the cemetery and all through the cemetery and back out again," Clarke said. "It's a great place to walk. We get lots of walkers."

"But the minute it starts to get dark the place is empty. I think that's from people watching too many scary movies. I'll go in there late at night. People can't believe that I'd go there after dark like that, but I've never seen anything out of the ordinary. It's one of the most peaceful places in town."

Jerry Mahlberg, who cares for the Catholic cemetery just west of Ridge Cemetery,

echoed those experiences.

"I've never even heard anyone talking about anything strange at the cemetery," Mahlberg said. "I've worked out there at night. If you ever drive through there at night, it's lit up."

A lighting system in the cemetery is set by timers, he said. Currently, the lights come on at 9:30 p.m. and go off around 4 a.m.

"It sure cuts down on vandalism," which both caretakers say is a far bigger issue than keeping away goblins on Halloween.

"We still have some vandalism even with the lights," Mahlberg said. "People still take stuff off graves. They steal stuff that's of no value: wreaths, shepherd staffs. I don't know what the big kick is. They used to break a lot of vases, but they seemed to have stopped that."

Clarke said the vandalism in Ridge Cemetery has slowed down dramatically.

"They used to go through the cemetery at a angle and just knock down monuments," Clarke said. "That isn't so much of a problem any more."

He jokes about being the caretaker of a cemetery.

"People tell me they understand why the cemetery isn't haunted. People say that those ghosts are where the people died. This is just where the bodies are," he said.

While ghosts and goblins won't be found in the cemetery,

Clarke said there are some things that are.

"We used to have a fox through here," he said. "We had a nest of redbill hawks. In the past, we had some monarch butterflies who would stop here on their migration. They didn't come this year."

"They would show up for two, three or four days and then be gone. They covered one pine tree in the middle of the cemetery specifically. That tree is dying. In fact, it's dead. Last year, there started to be signs of that. Maybe that's why they didn't come back."

Once in a while, however, screams can be heard in the cemetery.

"We might have some kids scaring each other. I've heard girls screaming and then went out and saw them goofing around," he said.

Clarke admits that his interest in cemetery activities isn't confined to his work. He likes to read Stephen King.

"I take it for what it is," he said. "It's a book."

But the cemeteries on the west side of Fremont haven't always been the place to go for local residents when they die. The current location of Barnard Park southeast of the Military Avenue/Clarkson Street intersection was once home to the dead in Fremont. Clarke said bodies were moved from what was once Green Grove Cemetery to the then-newly created Ridge Cemetery in 1878 because Green Grove Cemetery was nearly full.