

**interview by  
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**ICFM SUBJECT SPOTLIGHT**

**Brian Killelea**

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► Killelea is general manager of Worcester County Memorial Park, Paxton, Massachusetts. The park was founded in 1961 by his great uncle. His father, Kevin Killelea, is president.



Christ as the Shepherd is the feature for the Garden of the Good Shepherd, one of the first gardens to be developed at Worcester County Memorial Park.

► Worcester County Memorial Park encompasses approximately 95 acres, about half developed. It is a private, non-sectarian cemetery that handles 600-650 interments annually and has almost 18,000 total interments.

[www.wcmp.org](http://www.wcmp.org)

**T E C H N O L O G Y**



Brian Killelea is able to show families on this large screen what their loved one's Web page will look like. Every person interred at the cemetery gets a Web page.

Do you know what MySpace.com is? Brian Killelea does, and he wanted to bring the sense of connectedness and community created by MySpace and other online journals to the Web site for Worcester County Memorial Park. Think of it as MyEternalSpace.com.

## Online memorialization for all, including 'scattering' families

**W**orcester County Memorial Park is on the Web in a big way. All of its interments (around 18,000) are available online in a searchable database. Everyone interred at the park has his or her own Web page, even if all that's on it is name, burial date and grave site location.

For some people, Killelea has the obituary, photo and information about services that many funeral homes post on their Web sites. That information will stay on the site, and material more commonly associated with a video tribute can be added days or years later, as the family gets around to doing it.

Obituaries, tributes and photos can be uploaded to create permanent virtual memorials. Visitors to the site can order flowers as well as sign guest books and get maps to the grave site. There's even a Webcam transmitting real-time images of the cemetery.

A few weeks after the site was up and running, the cemetery's Web presence was profiled in two local newspapers, and traffic to the site shot up dramatically. ICFM talked to General Manager Brian Killelea about the cemetery's Web site, the work involved and the reaction from families so far.

**What kind of time and costs were involved in**



I've had people who, no joke, tell me, "I will pay any amount of money if you get a Webcam set up on my loved one's grave." I never anticipated that people would want that.



The view from the Webcam

on Friday, Sept. 8, at 11:27:15 a.m.

## The cemetery cam

Worcester County Memorial Park's Webcam is focused on one spot in the park. General Manager Brian Killelea says he installed it so people could check weather conditions at the park before driving out, since it's on a hill outside the city.

At the bottom of the memorial park's home page, [www.wcmp.org](http://www.wcmp.org), there is a photo from the Webcam under the heading, "Webcam: View our grounds live!" Click where indicated and the Webcam screen pops up.

Though the basic scene is always the same, viewers can see more than the weather as the camera uploads a new picture every few seconds. A clock in the upper left corner tells you when the picture you're seeing was snapped.

Usually the only way it's obvious that fresh pictures are being continually uploaded is the movement of the tree branches as they sway gently in the breeze, but now and then vehicles drive by or a visitor walks through the area. □



The Webcam view

a few minutes later, at 11:29:11 a.m.

## TECHNOLOGY

come in to the cemetery, I've installed a couple of large flat screen TVs in the office so I can show them what they can do. We're also working on putting some print material together to hand out.

To me, the reaction has been incredible. I anticipated that some people would get a kick out of it, but I've had people coming in just completely shaken, saying "I can't believe we're able to do this." I have people e-mail me every day, saying this is the most wonderful thing they've ever been able to do to memorialize a relative. They just really appreciate the opportunity.

**I love the Webcam (like the traffic cams many news sites offer), but what's the purpose of having it?**

We're located in a town just outside a larger city, and we're literally in a different climate zone because we're on a hill. It can be sunny 10 minutes away and snowing here. I put the Webcam in so that people could check out the weather before making the trek up here.

But the response I've been getting ... I've had people who, no joke, tell me, "I will pay any amount of money if you get a Webcam set up on my loved one's grave." I never anticipated that people would want that. A woman whose child is buried near where the camera is set up e-mailed me and said she leaves the Webcam on her computer every day at work. She's comforted by being able to see that everything's peaceful and tranquil up here. I never envisioned putting the Webcam to that type of use.

**Are you planning to install more Webcams?**

Yes. I think at some point as technology advances we'll probably be able to give people their own user-code password and a Webcam only they and the people they give the password to can view. I envision that probably in the near future. Until now, I would have said, "Not possible," but until now, I didn't think it was something people wanted.

The security benefits of having a lot of Webcams would be pretty good, too.

**Can you see anything on the Webcams at night?**

Not on this one right now, but it is possible to get night vision ones.

**Back to the topic of the Web site, do you think a cemetery that has been around a long time or has a huge number of inter-**

**ments should wait to get all of that information into a database before trying to offer something like this?**

I wouldn't say the older records need to be included. I think the younger generation appreciates this sort of service more. If someone does come in and say, "I've got an ancestor buried there and I'd love to have this information online," you can add those on a case-by-case basis.

It's funny; the families are the ones who provide all the extra material and do the work, and they're thanking *me*. They post the pictures, they send the obituaries. All I have to do on this end is read over it to make sure there's nothing objectionable such as vulgarity, click "approve" and that's it. I don't have to do any photo editing or anything like that.

**So you are the person approving postings?**

I am, just because it's so new and the whole thing has kind of been my baby; I have a hard time letting go.

**How soon do you usually get the obituary up?**

As quickly as I can. I try to get them up before the burial, because I want to be a source for people to check. I can post calling hours at the funeral home and the time for the Mass at the church. And people can click and get directions to the funeral home and church.

**Is there any restriction in terms of who's allowed to post information?**

Right now, we don't have any restrictions on what's posted, as long as it doesn't include vulgarity or profanity. But when someone says, "I'm the widow, I'd like to post a memorial," we verify that she is the wife. You have to start looking at next-of-kin issues. You wouldn't let anyone but the next-of-kin or the property owner put a marker up.

Other people can still post pictures and contribute guest book entries—unless the next-of-kin wants them locked out, which we have the ability to do.

I do see a lot of people making comments and posting obituaries for their grandparents. They're probably next-of-kin down. If their parents are not computer literate and don't mind, why stop people who are going to use the feature and appreciate it? I've got pictures up there of my grandmother; she was one of the test pilots for the program. My father checked the site to



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money in an endowment fund to keep the Web site up and running.

**But if you're not charging very much for the obituary, how is that going to help the cemetery financially with those cremation people who scatter?**

Even though we've got the site up and working now, it's still a work in progress. I've got a lot of ideas, so we'll be adding new features to the site. I think the different

features will be available à la carte, so that people can pick and choose. Maybe if you just want one thing it will be \$50; if you want everything, it will be \$500.

**So you'd rather people who scatter at least have a virtual memorial with the cemetery, even if they don't do anything else?**

Yes, I think the cemetery would be better off having \$100 instead of \$0. □

see what I'd done and he'd never seen one of the pictures I'd included.

And maybe my grandfather's buddies from the highway department have pictures of him we've never seen, and they can share them with us.

I read the comments people send in, and whether or not we make a dime on this, it makes me happy that we're allowing people to share memories. Cemeteries are so often associated with death, and it's nice to read about the lives. I think it's a whole new realm of memorialization we could be going after.

**So you don't think online memorials are a fad?**

I really don't. I think this is going to be the way we start tracking some of those cremation people who scatter. I think once we start getting more into the memories business instead of just the interment business, we're going to become more important. If we don't do it, other people will. There are already memorial Web sites out there that aren't owned by cemeteries or funeral homes going after this market.

**Right now you're not charging for this service. Is that because you're trying to get it going?**

Right, because we want to get it going. And even when we start charging, the charges are going to be minimal. I won't charge for photo-sharing, guest-book entries. The charge will be for setting up the initial obituary. We're going to put some of the