

## \$150,000 raised for Bryce memorial garden

By Lydia Seabol Avant Staff Writer

Published: Monday, February 14, 2011 at 3:30 a.m.

TUSCALOOSA | More than \$150,000 was raised to construct a memorial garden at one of Bryce Hospita's three cemeteries — almost twice the amount organizers projected for the project.

The money, collected through the Community Foundation of West Alabama, was given through private and corporate donations. In addition to the \$150,000 raised, the Alabama Department of Mental Health will contribute \$20,000 in discretionary funds raised through a golf tournament.



*Artist's rendering by architect Evans Fitts*  
A memorial garden honoring the more than 5,000 individuals buried on the grounds at Bryce Hospital is planned to open by the fall.

“When one looks at this project in relation to the overall demands for strapped public funds, this amount of money is small,” said Zelia Baugh, commissioner of the ADMH. “But, it represents the enormous potential of what people can achieve for projects all across the state with determination and without depending on government money.”

There are sporadic grave markers for the more than 5,000 people buried in the Bryce cemeteries, ranging from granite gravestones to wooden stakes and small iron, cloverleaf-shaped markers. Many of the markers were stolen or vandalized over the years. Others are hidden under weeds or dirt.

While there is a master list of names of Bryce patients buried in the cemeteries, it's hard to know exactly where they lie, since many of the markers were moved. Some graves were moved when River Road, now Jack Warner Parkway, was built in the 1970s, splitting the largest of the cemeteries in half.

In honor of the 150th anniversary of Bryce Hospital, the state plans to build a memorial garden by the fall, in time to host a commemoration ceremony at the cemetery.

The memorial garden will be planted at what is believed to be the site of infant burials, on a knoll overlooking Jack Warner Parkway, said Dr. Tom Hobbs, executive director of Western Mental Health Center in Birmingham, and chair of the committee.

“There’s a checkerboard-looking place for babies that were born and died at Bryce,” Hobbs said. “It’s overgrown, it looks like a dirt pile. There’s an old rusted, corrugated piece of tin that acts like a kind of border. The whole place looks terrible.”

As part of the memorial gardens, the infants and children’s cemetery will be cleaned and a granite and steel triangular monolith will be built nearby, said Tuscaloosa architect Evans Fitts, who donated the design for the garden. To either side of the monolith are planned 10-foot columns and a shorter pedestal, each topped by reproductions of the cloverleaf grave markers. Surrounding that would be a paved plaza with seating areas.

“It’s really kind of two memorials there,” Hobbs said, referring to the cleanup planned for the infant graveyard, and the main project in the foreground, centered by a triangular-shaped monolith.

The inspiration for the monument came from one of Bryce’s clients, which is important to the project, Fitts said.

“Consumers were asked to draw some ideas about what would be nice there, and the monolith was inspired by one of the concepts they came up with,” Fitts said. “We took the drawing and developed the idea.”

Although more than enough money has been raised for the memorial gardens — \$80,000 to \$100,000 was the original projected cost of the project — the fundraising will continue, Hobbs said. With the existing extra money, the memorial gardens committee plans to place a small monument at the other three cemetery sites and establish a mini-memorial at the gravesites of Dr. and Mrs. Peter Bryce on the front lawn of Bryce Hospital.

“In order to complete other cemetery projects, it is likely that we will need additional funds,” Hobbs said. “Since Bryce Hospital has touched the lives of so many families in Alabama, we hope that those individuals will continue to step forward to help us ensure that the thousands of people buried at Bryce Hospital will never be forgotten.”

Checks can be made payable to the Community Foundation of West Alabama, designated for the Bryce Hospital Cemetery Memorial Fund on the memo line, and mailed to the Community Foundation of West Alabama, P.O. Box 3033, Tuscaloosa, AL 35403.

For additional information, contact Steve Davis, historian at the Alabama Department of Mental Health, at 205-759-0711 or [steve.davis@bryce.mh.alabama.gov](mailto:steve.davis@bryce.mh.alabama.gov).

Reach Lydia Seabol Avant at 205-722-0222 or [lydia.seabolavant@tuscaloosaneews.com](mailto:lydia.seabolavant@tuscaloosaneews.com).

Copyright © 2011 TuscaloosaNews.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.