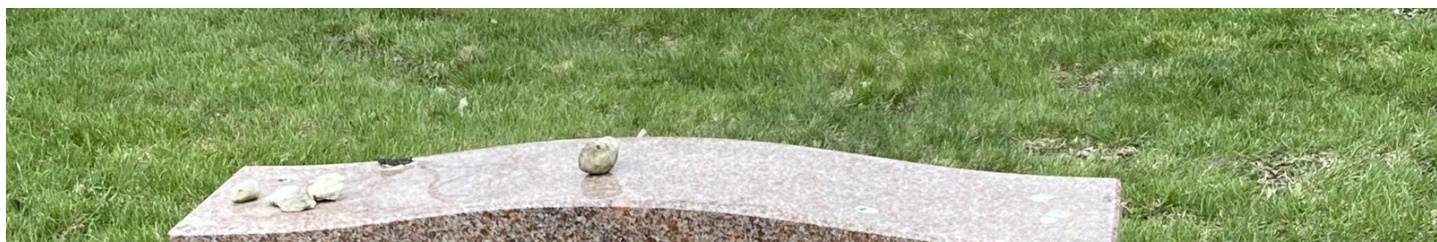


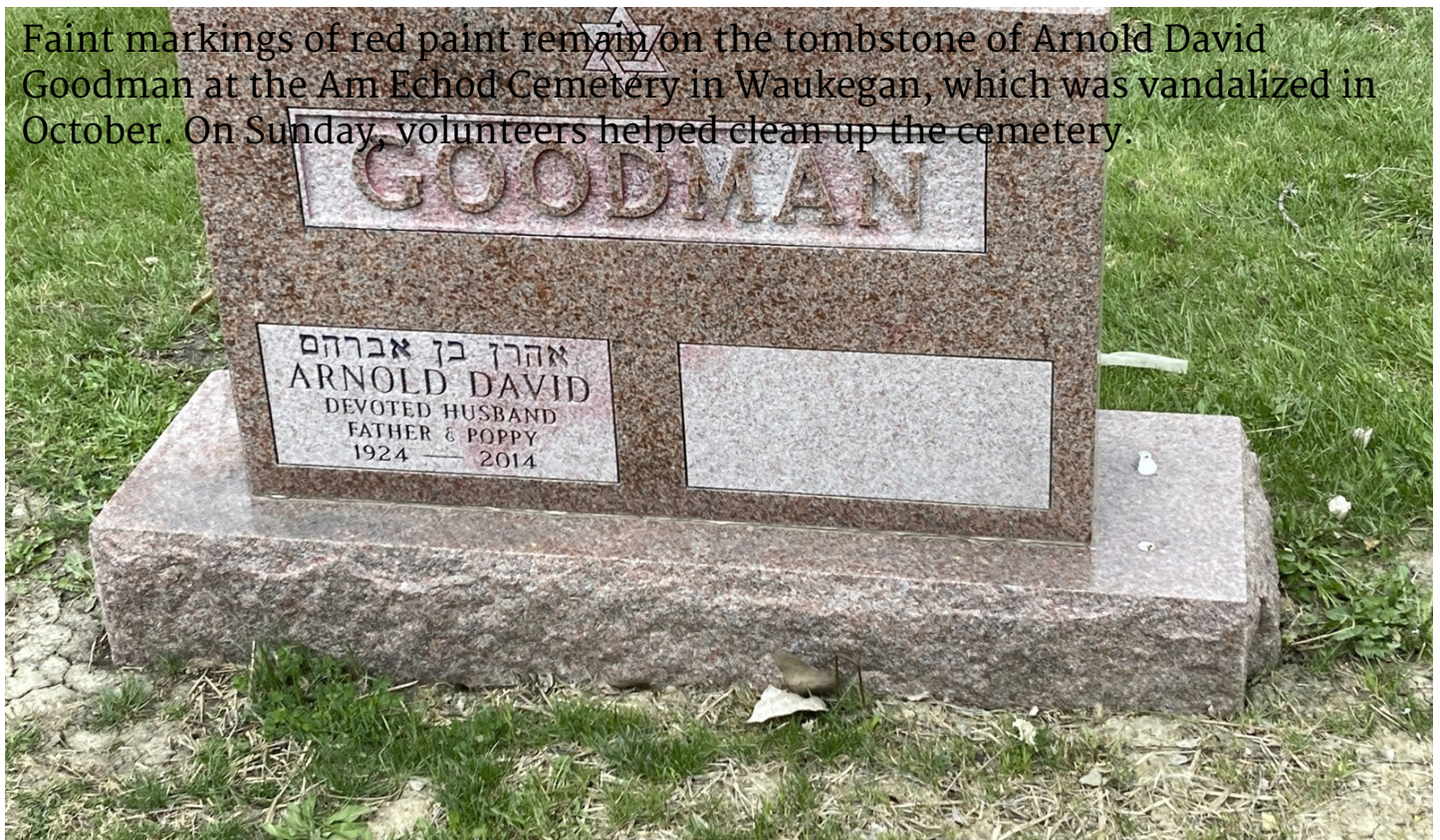
Group freshens up vandalized Jewish cemetery in Waukegan



Volunteers from Am Shalom in Glencoe fill a grave containing books and other holy objects that cannot be destroyed at the Am Echod Cemetery in Waukegan. Steve Sadin/News-Sun photos



Faint markings of red paint remain on the tombstone of Arnold David Goodman at the Am Echod Cemetery in Waukegan, which was vandalized in October. On Sunday, volunteers helped clean up the cemetery.



the headstone dedication for Lorna Goodman. “I can’t say enough about what the city and the Waukegan police department did to help us.”

Santi was among more than 50 people from Am Echod and Am Shalom congregation in Glencoe freshening the cemetery Sunday, and performing a Jewish rite burying books and other holy objects containing God’s name which must be buried, not destroyed.

Though the defacement of the tombstones remains very pale, it is noticeable. Santi said it is more visible on the lighter colored monuments. She found an entity to completely cleanse the markers.

“They will come and get it 100%,” Santi said. “Then we’ll do a rededication.”

When Rabbi Steven Lowenstein of Am Shalom was asked by one of his congregants who lives out of the area to check that family’s grave site in Waukegan, he said he made a personal visit.

Though that particular grave was not damaged, Lowenstein said he was shocked at what he saw and wanted to do something to help. He reached out to Santi, and they developed a plan.

“I’ve seen things like that in other parts of the world, but I never thought I would see it at a Jewish cemetery 20 miles away,” Lowenstein said.

As people from both congregations arrived at the cemetery, there were four freshly dug graves. Some already contained books or other sacred objects.

Lowenstein said they cannot be destroyed, even if they can no longer be used.

Santi said Chicago Jewish Funerals sent objects for burial in the genizah ceremony in the four graves set aside for it. Lowenstein said books and other sacred objects no longer used from Am Shalom were taken to Am Echod's cemetery for burial.

With the items from Chicago Jewish Funerals already in the graves, volunteers from Am Shalom wheeled carts of books and other holy items from their synagogue to the burial site.

"We are the people of the book, and these have been loved." Lowenstein said. "They must be stored until it can be taken to the cemetery. These have all been very well-studied."

Rabbi Andy Bossov of Am Echod said some prayer books are no longer used because references to God use the masculine gender which is not done anymore in many places.

"They're not egalitarian," Bossov said.

Along with burying the sacred items, Am Shalom members planted 18 yellow tulip plants around the cemetery grounds. Lowenstein said the number 18 symbolizes the Hebrew word for life.

Though currently operating out of an office in Grayslake with services conducted in a church, Santi said Am Echod has a long history in Waukegan. It was founded in 1896 as Jews were among many immigrants coming to a growing industrial city.

One of those immigrants was Jacob Blumberg. He arrived at 14 from what is now Lithuania. Barbara Blumberg, his granddaughter-in-law who now lives in Highland Park, said he brought a Torah from what is now Lithuania. It is still used at Am Echod.

When the original building of North Shore Congregation Israel — which has housed Am Shalom since 1982 — was dedicated in 1927, Lowenstein said a periodical at the time noted its significance.

"It said it was the 'first Jewish institution between Howard Street (in Chicago) and Waukegan,'" Lowenstein said.