

# Respectful Remembrance

With Westland Services Corp., Phil Haddad Jr. is keeping a pledge to make his father proud while also tending to the gravesite needs of families throughout North America in tender-loving-care fashion



Phil Haddad Jr. of Westland Services Corp. at the Adams family gravesite at Hope Cemetery in Worcester.

BY ROD LEE

Ask Ruth Noone about Westland Services Corp. and she will tell you the firm is a godsend.

Ask her about Philip G. Haddad Jr., Westland's president, and she will say he is a saint.

"I completely trust the man," Noone said recently in discussing personalized long-term beautification and gravesite-maintenance work Haddad's company provides her at the Noone-family plot in St. Joseph's Cemetery in Leicester. Noone's husband, who passed away in 1993, is buried there.

"In the spring, before Memorial Day, depending on the weather, (Westland) does a planting of different flowers. I saw this last week and it was very lovely," Noone, who resides at Botany Bay in Worcester, says. "In the fall, they put a winter wreath on the gravestone...Mr. Haddad sends me a picture of this landscaping, so if you don't happen to be able to get there, you can know what's been done. In my own instance, I'm not able to get to the cemetery to do the plantings, or even bring flowers. I had some evergreens planted on either

side of the gravesite and [Westland] is taking care of these as well. Mr. Haddad is a very kind man.”

“Mr. Haddad” is also a pioneer with the formation of Westborough-based Westland Services Corp., which is marking its twentieth anniversary as the only deliverer of “respectful remembrance” assistance to families anywhere in North America at a one-time cost. And he is a dutiful, faithful son with his continual striving to live up to the request his dad uttered every day upon leaving for work: “Phil, make me proud.”

**THE ELDER HADDAD**, who was chairman of Parks & Recreation for the city of Worcester at the time, died of a heart attack at the age of fifty-one. Phil Jr. was just nineteen. “We were very, very close,” Haddad told *The Buzz*, reiterating an observation he had also made during an interview with *International Cemetery, Cremation and Funeral Association (ICCF)* magazine’s Susan Loving.

A licensed funeral director in Massachusetts since 1967, Haddad launched Westland after increasingly hearing people, including widows, tell him that, because of health problems or the need to relocate to be closer to their children, “I—we will no longer be able to take care of the gravesite.” When one woman in such circumstances asked him, “Phil, is there someone who can take care of my gravesite?,” Haddad, who had handled the husband’s funeral and who held the pre-arrangement contract for the woman, told her, “Don’t worry about it. You go ahead and move closer to your children. I will take care of it for you.”

In this fashion, he says, “one gravesite turned into three, and ultimately I was taking care of twenty-three of them.”

Ten years of research later, Haddad came up with what he considered to be “a wonderful plan” to personally maintain gravesites for families. In developing a system that involves twenty five-year contracts carrying prices that range from about \$3,900 to \$13,900 (the minimum contract, called “the Tribute,” consists of three visits to the gravesite a year), Haddad had to navigate a virtual minefield of obstacles—from limitations and restrictions imposed by government to initial resistance from some cemetery superintendents.



**Above: The Noone-family gravesite at St. Joseph’s Cemetery in Leicester; maintained by Westland Services.. Below: The Mizner-family gravesite at St. Brigid Cemetery in Meadville, Pennsylvania; maintained by Westland Services.**



That Westland has overcome these challenges is reflected in the company’s quiet but spectacular growth. Even as the funeral-home industry has “imploded” in the past five years or so, in large part because it is “answering to stockholders instead of families” and thus “losing focus,” Westland is in full surge mode, Haddad says.

Westland (the company derives its name from the idea that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, and because people are buried “in the west land of their lives”) has twenty-two offices in thirty-five states and is presently expanding in leaps and bounds. Haddad’s son David is developing the west coast in the San Diego area and his daughter Stephanie, who is situated in Amsterdam, Holland, will help set that region up “as our international headquarters,” Haddad says.

**HADDAD ADMITS** to having been “very conservative” in his approach to establishing and building Westland. “I crawl before I walk and walk before I run,” he says. “We had to pass muster with all of the principals,” he notes.

He also “gives back” in ways beyond his dealings with clientele. “My roots and ties to Worcester run deep,” he says, in pointing out that “everyone knows I am committed to businesses in Worcester County (and have been since Westland’s inception) for the production of all aspects of our business—shipping materials, products and all paraphernalia.”

Westland’s apparatus consists of “plan counselors” who meet with families to lay out programs and options, and “craftsmen” who provide the customized plantings and maintenance schedules that Westland offers. How Westland’s craftsmen actually accomplish their mission is “a trade secret,” Haddad says.

No one is meeting the needs of families when it comes to ongoing gravesite maintenance in the “specific” way Westland does, Haddad says. Westland even handles several names at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. In another example of its strict adherence to families’ dictates, Westland acceded to the request of a Polish family whose members stipulated that all flowers at the gravesite must be red and white—the colors of the Polish flag. For a woman whose late husband used to sit on the deck in the morning,

drinking coffee, reading the newspaper and "singing back" to the cardinals, Haddad met her request for a photo of a cardinal to be placed at the gravesite by finding a Beanie Baby cardinal and putting it in the tray of flowers. She wept when she saw it. "I provided Beanie Baby cardinals for each of her six children, as well as the photo we always take of the decorated gravesite," he told ICCFA magazine. "A new cardinal is placed in each tray of flowers on Memorial Day and in the winter basket."

Dr. H. Martin Deranian of Shrewsbury, a Worcester dentist, author and historian who has family members buried in Hope Cemetery in Worcester, said, "I was one of Phil Haddad's first clients (about sixteen years ago). I thought he offered a very unique service. Westland sees that the area is kept presentable and clean. It's something that's very valuable to me."

As an outgrowth of all it has accomplished to date, Westland has been approached by the federal government about maintaining the memorials and gravesites in Europe of U.S. soldiers killed in World War II, Haddad says.

**WESTLAND IS ESSENTIAL** in today's marketplace, Haddad says, as an alternative for families to respectfully remember loved ones. Families contract with Westland to "take the responsibility and guilt" for burial-site maintenance "off our children" he says.

In asserting that Westland is "well-positioned" for further growth, Haddad says that a survey "we did" showed that seniors' five biggest concerns are: 1) health and financial stability; 2) death (which is typically placed on the "backburner"); 3) "who will care for my final resting place?" (backburner); 4) making peace with the Almighty; and 5) materialistic issues ("should I take the cruise I've never gone on?").

During this period of transition, he says, "costs are driving families to the cremation aspect" and "payment is expected by the day of the funeral." At the calling hours, there is no body, no casket. "Families are settling for a disposition they don't really want," he says.

That's where Westland comes in.

As Phil Haddad's dad said on his deathbed, "A life worth living is a life worth remembering."

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