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NEWS

Green Acres owner making no promises, Hosemann says

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The wife of the late owner of Green Acres Memorial Park said Friday two employees would remain employed at the cemetery for the time being, but she could not guarantee vaults and other pre-paid services would be provided as needed, said Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann.

Hosemann said he spoke with Linda Graham — whose husband, Mike Graham, died in 2007 and whose company, Mike Graham and Associates LLC, owns Green Acres. Hosemann and Mrs. Graham spoke shortly after Chancellor Vicki Roach Barnes ordered a temporary restraining order against Green Acres of Vicksburg LLC and froze all known bank accounts associated with the company.

"She indicated to me that she would be able to maintain the employees for a short period of time, but she was unable to assure me that she would have sufficient funds to pay for burial vaults in the event of a death in the next few weeks," said Hosemann, a Vicksburg native. "I asked her to maintain her employees on site and honor her company's obligations to the individuals in Warren County who have entrusted the company with their money."

Mississippi law requires businesses selling pre-need cemetery services to keep at least 85 percent of money collected through the sale of services in a trust account. Hosemann said investigators with his office discovered a trust account for Green Acres was missing roughly \$373,000 after an interested buyer of the cemetery requested information on any outstanding liabilities. Hosemann said Green Acres of Vicksburg LLC has several liens on it, including one from the state tax commission, and added he did not know if the prospective buyer was still interested in the cemetery.

About 3,200 graves are located in the approximately 15 acres at Green Acres. Hosemann said his research indicates at least 80 to 100 people have paid Green Acres for pre-need services that are still to be fulfilled. Hosemann said he did not discuss with Graham why the company's trust account held \$221.60 or if the missing money has been spent or transferred to another account.

"I didn't ask those kinds of questions as they are part of the litigation. She did tell me that she did not keep up with the trust funds; that her husband had previously handled that," said Hosemann, who added those questions will be answered as the lawsuit against the company unfolds. "We are taking every legal step we can to collect the funds and ensure the cemetery will be managed."

Barnes set a hearing for Feb. 2 to begin untangling the cemetery's accounts, contracts and operating records since 2001, when Mike Graham and Associates purchased the cemetery.

Allegations of neglect and slow delivery of markers led to several personal lawsuits against the cemetery since it was taken over by Mike Graham and Associates — which Hosemann said also owns eight cemeteries in South Carolina.

In October, a trailer that served as the business office for Green Acres at the entrance of the cemetery was dismantled. Office employees told a Secretary of State investigator the building was being repossessed and the records were being moved to a self-storage facility in Vicksburg.

A woman who answered the listed business number for Green Acres in Vicksburg on Friday identified herself as the office manager and said the business was "up and running," but declined to provide her name or further information.

Messages left for Linda Graham and Stephanie Graham — identified in the lawsuit as Mike Graham's daughter and president of the company — were not returned.