

Jerry Brock wants to be buried in a nice cemetery, so he's doing some of the work now

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On Jerry Brock's gravestone at Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe, an image shows a smiling young man. Underneath that is his favorite car and favorite song. But there's no date of death next to his date of birth. *Karina Bland/The Republic*

At the top of Jerry Brock's gravestone at Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe is a portrait, etched into the black granite, of a smiling young man.

Beneath that is an image of his all-time favorite car, a 1940 Ford Standard Coupe — he had two in his lifetime — and the name of his favorite song, Jesse Belvin's "Guess Who."

A quote at the bottom says, "Most of my regrets are those I have caused myself. For those I have harmed, I sincerely ask for your forgiveness. God bless."

What's not there is a date of death next to his date of birth.

Brock isn't dead yet. He's planning ahead.

"I've been in Tempe almost all my life," he said, "and when I die, I want to be buried here."

This is his city.



The Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe stretches across 40 acres, part of it grassy and tree-lined, the older sections left in natural desert landscape. *Karina Bland/The Republic*

He was 9 when his family moved to Tempe in 1949. He attended Tempe Grammar School but left school after eighth grade and worked in his dad's salvage yard.

At 15, he got in a car accident — he'd been driving since he was 9 — and the police officer who responded told him he could go to juvenile hall or back to school.

He went back to school for three weeks.

"I got to looking around school, and there was nobody watching," he said, "so I left."

He started his own auto salvage business, sold it and opened an auto parts business, Brock Supply, building it from a one-man operation into a international distributor.

At 81, he still works there.

Years ago, Brock read a story about how gravestones were changing, no longer just monotone gray tablets. "Someday I am going to do that," he decided. He bought a plot and, this year, had his gravestone installed.



At Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe, some grave markers are chipped and broken, the names and dates faded. Some have toppled onto the ground. *Karina Bland/The Republic*

Brock looked out at the cemetery, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. The first recorded burial here was in 1888.

The edges of the roads have crumbled. Concrete curbing surrounding many graves has cracked.

Some markers are chipped and broken, the names and dates faded. Some have toppled onto the ground. One grave is marked only by a pile of stones.

“It’s in pretty bad shape,” Brock said. He wants to fix it up, but not just because he’ll be buried here. This place has a history.



Double Buttes Cemetery in Tempe has been privately and publicly owned over the years, and maintenance has been spotty. The city owns it now. *Karina Bland/The Republic*

The Double Butte Cemetery in Tempe stretches across 40 acres, part of it grassy and tree-lined, the older sections left in natural desert landscape.

It's where many of the city's pioneers and civic leaders are buried, including former Gov. John Howard Pyle, who once called the cemetery "Tempe's Arlington."

It's also where the damage is worst.

So much of the city's history is here, Brock said, walking among the graves of governors, city leaders, doctors, firefighters, police officers, teachers and veterans.

People from various ethnic groups were buried alongside one another at a time when that didn't happen, he noted, generations of the Arredondos, Arbizus, and Valenzuelas, as well as Native people and Japanese-Americans, evidence of how they worked and lived together in the city's early days.



Many of Tempe's pioneers and civic leaders are buried at Double Buttes Cemetery, including former Gov. John Howard Pyle who once called the cemetery "Tempe's Arlington." *Karina Bland/The Republic*

While Brock has seen some improvements to the grounds lately, he's intent on doing more.

He donated \$10,000 to the Tempe Historic Preservation Foundation to come up with an improvement plan.

"If you don't preserve these historic sites, then the soul of your city disappears," said former Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman, who's on the foundation's board.

Brock's idea is to partner with the city and private donors. The cemetery has been privately and publicly owned over the years, and maintenance has been spotty. The city owns it now, but finances are tight. Brock will match what others donate.

He donates money to the city every year for projects and to community organizations. It's why he's worked hard over the years, so he can help.

It started when he was young businessman. He would read a newspaper story about a child hit by a car, clip out the article and send it with \$100 to the family.

"I've always tried to do things for other people," he said. "I don't think I'm a saint or anything."



At Double Buttes Cemetery in Tempe, the edges of the asphalt roads are crumbling. Concrete curbing surrounding many graves is cracked. *Karina Bland/The Republic*

As his business grew, Brock gave more. He hadn't known the cemetery was in such disrepair until he put his gravestone there. Now he wants to help preserve his city's history.

"I'm not going to leave this earth without leaving some of that money to other people," Brock said.

He can't take it with him, but he can keep some of it close by.

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