



MANSFIELD: TRAFFIC WORRIES

WINDHAM: HOUSING REHABS

COVENTRY: CEMETERY COMMISSION

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Chapman to leave cemetery board

Oversaw massive changes at Coventry's cemeteries

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COVENTRY — What started a decade ago to help her cope with the tragic loss of her son is coming to an end.

The town's steering committee Monday discussed the resignation of long-time cemetery commission Chairman Sherry Chapman.

Chapman joined the commission 10 years ago after her son, Ryan Ramirez, was killed in a car accident in 2002 at 19.

Serving on the cemetery commission was a way for her to cope with the tragedy, she said.

"Ryan is buried in one of the town's cemeteries, and it felt like I was caring for him when I was caring for the town's cemeteries. It helped me in the sense that it kept me busy and provided another channel for me to do something for my son," said Chapman, who made a promise to her late son she would do what she could to make the cemeteries more welcoming.

"I joined the commission just over 10 years ago this year, and I thought I could make some

positive changes in town and I think that I've done what I can do for the cemetery commission. We only have so many decades in our lives," said Chapman, who will pursue her different interests and projects. "I'm working on a memoir, and I've been letting too many things interfere with that, and I had to assess how I was spending my time and what I could release to finish that project."

Since working with the commission, Chapman helped install uniform signs at all of the town's cemeteries, held public workshops educating residents on stone carving, monument cleaning and repair and historical carvers. She has also helped establish self-guided cemetery tours, publish informational brochures, help Dennis and Dibbon Joy reunite footstones to headstones in Grant Hill's Cemetery and construct a contemplation area in Nathan Hale Cemetery overlooking Lake Wangumbaug.

"She took the commission and turned it around and made it vital and productive part of the community. Sherry has been an invaluable part of the community. She's very modest of her achievements. She was a national awardee for highway safety," said Councilman Lisa Thomas.

She spent the years following Ramirez's

death coping, healing and finding ways to prevent the same thing from happening to another through education, awareness and legislation.

Chapman is co-founder and president of IMPACT, or Mourning Parents Act, a non-profit organization dedicated to preventing teen-driving tragedies through educational programs, raising awareness of the dangers of distracted and drunk driving and legislation, and has received awards and accolades for her work.

This year, she was one of 14 citizen activists recognized for the Highway Safety Hero award, an award given to those who have dedicated time and effort to advance highway safety initiatives.

The award was presented by Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety this year.

"I have enjoyed the 10 years I have served on this commission. It has been a pleasure meeting and working closely with other commission members, town employees and elected officials. Unfortunately, competing commitments prevent me from dedicating the time this position deserves," wrote Chapman in her resignation letter.

Her resignation will be effective Dec. 31.