

dustry a treacherous one for consumers. It starts with the fact that many people make burial decisions that typically can cost \$2,000 to \$12,000 under emotional duress. That means that too many consumers are reluctant or emotionally unable to haggle over a contract for the final disposition of their own or a loved one's remains—and unlikely to question any suspected abuses. Meanwhile, the federal government is missing in action. This leaves states to regulate the industry as they see fit, which, all too often, they do inadequately. Add to this the lucrative nature of the cemetery business, and you have fertile ground for rampant consumer abuse. Of course, many cemeteries are well-run, ethical operations. The problem is that you often can't tell whether the cemetery with which you are dealing is one of them until it is too late.

PLOT PROFITS. The allegations that were made at Eden Memorial were not the first of their kind to be leveled against Houston-based SCI. In 2001, relatives of people who were buried in the two SCI-owned Menorah Gardens cemeteries in southern Florida sued, alleging that workers were disposing of human remains to make room for more graves. As is alleged in Eden Memorial, the Menorah Gardens lawsuit claims that the cemetery broke open vaults and disturbed remains in an attempt to generate more revenues by packing more graves into close quarters. In 2003, the company settled with the plaintiffs for \$65 million—admitting no wrongdoing—and \$35 million was placed in trust for pending, related litigation. It settled with Florida for \$14 million as part of a plea agreement.

Nevertheless, SCI hardly is the only cemetery company that has faced accusations of desecrating graves to make more money. In the summer of 2009, four employees of Perpetua-owned Burr Oak cemetery in Alsip, Ill., were arrested for allegedly disinterring corpses and dumping them in a weedy lot, so the workers could sell the spaces to others.

Such examples of what cemetery critics call *grave recycling* are both common and by no means an exclusive practice of corporate-owned cemetery chains, says Carolyn Jacobi, who worked in cemetery sales and manage-

