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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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“GRAVE MATTERS & UNTIMELY DEPARTURES” RETURNS
TO FORTUNA SUNRISE CEMETERY
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, FROM 2 P.M. – 6 P.M.
FOR AN AFTERNOON OF MYSTERY & MAYHEM

Tenth Annual “Grave Matters” Tour Includes Nine Intriguing Stories of the
Eerily Departed

Friends of the Fortuna Cemetery District presents the tenth annual production of **“Grave Matters & Untimely Departures”** on Sunday, October 27, beginning at 2 p.m. at Fortuna’s Sunrise Cemetery (above Newburg Park). The last tour (dubbed the “flashlight tour”) leaves at 6:00 p.m.

In honor of the production’s tenth anniversary, this year’s **“Grave Matters”** includes five new stories as well as four “greatest hits” characters from previous productions. The four returning characters are the Fortuna High School student killed in a 1928 football accident, a mother who died rescuing her daughter from a well shaft in 1912, a Portland university student who took part in a double suicide in the redwoods in 1966, and America Jane Moore, who divorced three husbands in the 1870s and 80s and chased her third husband off the family property at gunpoint. Among the new characters joining them are a would-be deadly dentist who tried to kill a colleague who’d insulted him, the daughter of the Star Hotel owners who died as a bride in 1907 and was buried in her wedding gown, and Fortuna Police officer Ray Q. Mills, who died in the line of duty 52 years ago.

Directed and researched by Dr. Alexandra Service (curator of the Fortuna Depot Museum), the cast of **“Grave Matters”** includes some of the area’s finest actors, several of them returning for another engagement at Sunrise Cemetery.

Tickets for **“Grave Matters”** are \$15 and can be purchased in advance at Green’s Pharmacy (1058 Main Street, Fortuna), at Grocery Outlet (Strong’s Creek shopping center, Fortuna) or on the day of the performance in the Newburg Park parking lot.

The first tour begins at 2 p.m. and the final tour will start at 6 p.m. Tours leave every 10 minutes. Each tour runs approximately 50 minutes and will take place rain or shine. Comfortable shoes are encouraged. Parking is available at Newburg Park where a shuttle will transport patrons to and from the cemetery. No vehicles are allowed in the cemetery during the performance. **“Grave Matters and Untimely Departures”** is a fundraiser for the Fortuna Cemetery District.

Depot Museum curator Service said, “After ten years of **‘Grave Matters,’** we are still finding new stories filled with drama, tragedy, mystery and adventure. This year we’re excited to introduce five new stories, and to bring back four favorite **‘Grave Matters’** characters from past years, who will share their moving and memorable tales with us again.”

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“Grave Matters & Untimely Departures” / page 2

The stories and cast for the 2019 **“Grave Matters”** include:

Host: Dr. Raymond Nelson

Actor: Caleb Haley

Dentist Raymond Nelson worked in Fortuna for a few months in 1942. In San Francisco that summer, he told a friend, “Well, so long, I am going to hell,” and set out to murder a fellow dentist. In his suicide note, Nelson explained, “He made a remark which infuriated me. I told him if he ever repeated that remark, to me or anyone else, I would kill him. He repeated it ...”

Cemetery Resident: Emma Lane Smith

Actor: Heather Garrison

Emma Lane was a Fortuna “favorite daughter” whose parents ran the Star Hotel. Working as a cashier in the Bank of Fortuna, she and the bank’s founder fell in love. They married, but as the *Humboldt Beacon* reported, “less than a year ago [she] left Fortuna a bride, only to be brought back within a few brief months, her voice stilled in death.”

Cemetery Resident: Margaret Willsie Daggett

Actor: Kathy Marks

When she was 13 years old she married a Civil War veteran 16 years her senior. Of their eight children, four died in infancy. After 49 years of marriage, Margaret Daggett and her husband died within two months of each other.

Cemetery Resident: Elsie Gushaw Stickney

Actor: Rebbecca Caya

The daughter of a pioneer Humboldt family, Elsie Gushaw Stickney was far from home when she died in 1923. Her death was due to an accident on the Pacific Highway between Tacoma and Seattle, caused when the driver’s hat blew off and he made a U-turn to retrieve it.

Cemetery Resident: America Jane Moore Elliott Burge Cameron

Actor: Carol Lang

America Jane Moore came to California by wagon train in 1846 when she was seven years old. Her first husband’s father and older brother were among the ringleaders of the Bear Flag Revolt. A pioneer of Sonoma, Lake and Tehama counties, America Jane was three times married and divorced each of her husbands. During the third divorce, she chased her husband out of the house at gunpoint.

-more-

“Grave Matters & Untimely Departures” / page 3

Cemetery Resident: Orra Doke Herriford

Actor: Caroline McFarland

Her family life in Tehama County was shattered in a tragic and scandalous court case. Remarried and hoping for a fresh start in Humboldt County, Orra Doke Herriford instead met her death rescuing her teen-aged daughter from a well shaft filled with poison gas.

Cemetery Resident: Leo Gallagher

Actor: David Fells

Leo Gallagher was a 16-year-old junior at Fortuna High when he died as the result of an accident in a Fortuna/Ferndale football game, the final game of the 1928 season. Because of Leo's death, the Fortuna High student body voted to ban football at the school. There was no football at Fortuna High for the next 17 years—one year longer than Leo had lived.

Cemetery Resident: Sheila Davenport

Actor: Alyx Sirca

As a 23-year-old student at Portland State, Sheila Davenport's life should have been just beginning. Instead she ended her life in a double-suicide pact with a fellow student, camping out beneath the redwoods at Bull Creek Flat. The suicide of Sheila Davenport and Robert Murtagh was said to be inspired by the 1811 suicide of a German author whose works they had been reading in class.

Cemetery Resident: Ray Q. Mills

Actor: David Hamilton

In March 1967, 32-year-old Ray Mills was a husband, father, Korean War veteran, and had recently joined the Fortuna Police Department. Police Chief Dale Livingstone would call Ray "one of the best we have had in a long time." Ray was killed by a hit-and-run driver in the early-morning hours one Sunday, while assisting another officer with a highway traffic stop just north of Fortuna.