

# Automation Comes To Tombstone Industry

By W.W. EDGAR

Automation and the environment movement have caught up with the tombstone industry.

No longer do the stonecutters have to stand by the hour and tediously carve out the lettering in memory of someone's loved one.

The masterful touch of the old tradesman gave way some years ago to the art of sand blasting, and even now, he no longer need stand by the hour guiding the nozzle of the blaster. It is automated today. And production has increased immeasurably over the old days.

THE ECOLOGY wave struck with the automated cutting of the stone that now permits a real face lifting of old fashioned stones and the "recycling" of monuments.

"We are at the point now where we can take old stones in trade -- just like automobiles," says Jim Allen

of Allen Monument Works, the firm founded by his father Mike on Northville Road.

"With the system of automatic cutting by use of a revolving chain and carborundum, we can correct mistakes and do it much cheaper than in the old days when mistakes virtually ruined the stone."

With this cutting system the stones can be "shaved" the depth of the lettering at a speed of about six to eight inches an hour. Once "shaved," the stone has a new surface and the sandblasting of the lettering can be done anew.

"Many folks," the younger Allen pointed out, "desire more modern designs and lettering in keeping with the trends in the modern cemeteries. So they have a choice of revamping the old stone or turning it on a new design."

THE NEW TREND helped bring about a major change in the tombstone industry, according to Allen.

The old-fashioned idea that each grave should have a marker has given way to the style of having one large stone in the center of the plot. Along with that, the modern cemetery has gone a step further and permits only ground level markers.

"This has reduced tombstone market considerably," Allen stated, "and our company has branched out into the area of cemetery maintenance to help balance the loss."

"We also have moved into the market -- ever so slightly -- of sandblasting lettering on glass signs. This seems to be a coming thing. Right now we haven't done much of it. But we are ready."

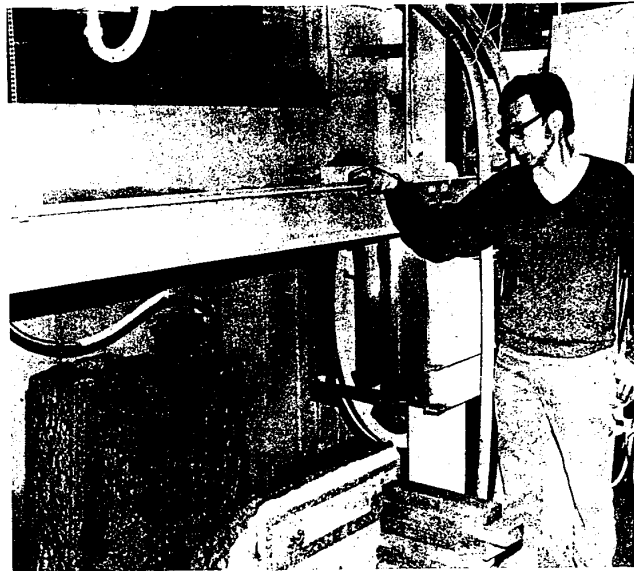
STRANGELY, the elimination of above-ground stone markers in favor of ground-level plates has increased the work of cemetery maintenance.

As Allen explains it, the grass has a tendency to grow over the edge of the marker -- just as it does on your walks at home.

"This means hand trimming and a lot of extra man hours," he said.

Mechanical sandblasting and stonecutting have reduced the long, tedious hours of the old stone cutting days.

Now, instead of using the hammer and chisel and hand carving the letters, a rubber cover is placed over the stone. The designs and lettering are traced on the rubber, then cut



GETTING A FACE LIFTING — Here's an old fashioned tombstone going through the process of rejuvenation. Jim Allen stands by, watching the revolving chain and carborundum cutting off the antique lettering. This is done automatically and the cut averages six inches an hour. (Observer photo by Bob Woodring)

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out to leave the open space for the sand blaster.

The stone is then placed in a small room in front of the sandblasting nozzle. Once the switch is turned the nozzle moves across the stone, blasting out letters in less than one quarter the time it required by hand.

### SC Acquires Oxygen Unit

Fred W. Wrenbeck, Schoorcraft College's director of security, reports that his department has added a portable oxygen unit which is available to students, employees and visitors.

All members of the Security Dept. have been trained in the use of the portable oxygen unit. In addition, each has

completed 32 hours of advanced first-aid training.

"We are happy to have this capability as an added service to the campus community," Wrenbeck said. He added that the advanced training by members of his department was taken on their own time and at no cost to the college.

### Sure Sign

Persons who continuously ask other people to repeat what has been said should have an electronic hearing test to determine whether or not they are suffering from a hearing loss.

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### Edgewood PTO Meets Feb. 9

The Suburban Choral will entertain when Edgewood Elementary School's Parent-Teacher Organization meets on Wednesday, Feb. 9, at 8 p.m. in the school's multi-purpose room.

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