

## Cassilly's dream in limbo - Blueprint for Cementland vanishes; supporters hope to fulfill his vision.

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ST. LOUIS - Along the winding gravel roads of Bob Cassilly's Cementland on Tuesday, several workers walked around the property with purpose, looking busy, doing something.

A dozen or more vehicles were parked inside near the gated entrance. The rumbling engines of heavy machinery broke the midday silence.

A day after Cassilly, the founder of the City Museum, was found dead on the industrial playground he called Cementland, the work of the eccentric St. Louisan appeared to still have life.

City officials, friends and comrades expressed hope that Cassilly's plans for converting his collection of rusted riverside ruins into an amusement park could survive his death.

But no one knows yet how anyone might fulfill the whims of a man whose ever-changing master plan seemed to reside inside his head.

"The thing we have to do is get Bob buried and then take a deep breath and try to pick up the pieces," said Bruce Gerrie, curator of architecture for the City Museum and Cassilly's friend of more than four decades.

Cassilly, 61, was found dead early Monday morning on the grounds of Cementland in the front cabin of a damaged bulldozer that appeared to have slipped down a hill and flipped over. The St. Louis medical examiner said preliminary autopsy results showed Cassilly suffered multiple injuries including serious head trauma. It was not clear Tuesday exactly when he died, but relatives began to worry late Sunday when he didn't show up to pick up his children.

Cassilly's family was focused on planning his funeral, and members said they were not ready to comment on Cementland's future. Funeral arrangements had not been finalized.

For about a decade, Cassilly had worked on the 55-acre site of the former Missouri Portland Cement Co., which straddles the line between St. Louis and the village of Riverview. He had missed his scheduled 2010 opening, frequently changed his plans and faced code violations for working without permits.

His latest vision for Cementland called for man-made mounds, a winding moat system for kayakers with water pumped from in the Mississippi River, a castle, nature trails, observation towers, a skywalk, beaches, pools, a lagoon and a sculpture garden.

"We classified it as an amusement park, but Bob didn't like that word," said Dan Fraley, building commissioner for the village of Riverview. "To him, it was supposed to be just a place where people could go do things they wouldn't normally do."

Fraley said that whenever he toured the property with Cassilly, the museum founder described various attractions "with a big old smile on his face."

Now, Fraley says he is concerned Cementland won't become a reality for the Riverview area.

"I would sure welcome somebody to come in and take over," he said. "For our community, it sure would have helped out with all the people it would have drawn there."

Gerrie said Cassilly's workers were a dedicated bunch that, he hopes, can find a way to finish his work.

"His employees were very loyal and were proud to work there and want to continue to work there," Gerrie said. "But without Bob, I don't know who's going to take the reins."

The City Museum will open for regular business today as workers and artists continue to mourn Cassilly's death.

Museum director Rick Erwin said the staff would continue to fulfill Cassilly's vision for the museum.

"We are going to continue this project and his work," said Erwin. "There is no way this is going to stop."

St. Louis Alderman Dionne Flowers, whose ward includes part of Cementland, expressed confidence that the project would move forward - even if Cassilly was not one for blueprints.

"He said, 'Who needs drawings when it's in my head?'" Flowers recalled.

Flowers got, incrementally, glimpses of what Cassilly was planning. He once gave her a booklet that described the project and presented a model she compared to an "ant farm."

Cassilly anticipated opening in March 2012, Flowers said. Even if the project does languish, she is not worried about its becoming an eyesore. Most of the work is visible only on the property, and, after all, the site was an abandoned cement plant before Cassilly arrived.

Though his fanciful ideas at times seemed to violate the laws of physics - such as the "conveyor belt" that would import water from the Mississippi River into Cementland - Cassilly didn't have a problem making others buy into his vision.

His wife, Melissa Giovanna "Gigi" Zompa Cassilly, was a key believer in Cementland, Flowers said.

"His wife was right there with him," Flowers said. "She will fight to make sure this thing comes out to be what was in his mind."

• **Caption:** Photo by Robert Srenco A view facing east of Cementland, the former Missouri Portland Cement Co., at Riverview Drive and Scranton Avenue. City Museum founder Bob Cassilly, who was found dead at the site Monday, was turning it into an amusement park. Photo by Johnny Andrews • [jandrews@post-dispatch.com](mailto:jandrews@post-dispatch.com) A metal sculpture directly across the street draws your attention to structures at Cementland on Riverview Drive in north St. Louis. Bob Cassilly, the developer of Cementland and the City Museum, was found dead Monday in a construction accident at the project. Local officials and friends hope Cassilly's plans for turning the site into an amusement park can still be completed.

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