

## Ridin' the big rigs

### Honoring 'forgotten' dead of Laconia School

By DAN SEUFERT

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**MEREDITH** — In the backwoods of Meredith Center, across from a public landing on Lake Wicwas on Chemung Road, a small cemetery holds 164 graves of "forgotten" former inhabitants of the Laconia State School, an institution for the developmentally disabled that closed in 1991.

But there are only a few dozen headstones at the cemetery. Until 2011, the lot had grown over with grass, was sometimes vandalized, and was often tracked over by boaters using the landing.

On Saturday, students from the Cocheco Arts and Technology Academy gathered with a few former residents and workers at the state school to dedicate the graveyard's first-ever sign and a mixed-metal garden arch over the cemetery's entrance. Both were made as part of a yearlong project by the 90 students of the academy, a charter school in Dover that focuses on arts and technology education.

Among those invited to the event was Freda Smith of Salem, who is a member of People First of New Hampshire, a nonprofit group working to improve treatment of people with disabilities.

The film and the speaker inspired the students to research the former state school and the cemetery, said Christy Holmes, the school's director. With the help of parent Candace Coleman Mc-Crea, the effort produced the sign and the arch.

People First, which led the beautification project at the cemetery in September 2011, welcomed the effort by the Cocheco students.

"It's about time that we mark the graves for the people of that institution that are so rightfully theirs," said Smith, who had a daughter at the state school.

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